

FAMOUS BEAUTIES

AND

HISTORIC WOMEN.

A GALLERY OF CROQUIS BIOGRAPHIQUES.

BY

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"DWELLERS ON THE THRESHOLD ;" "MEMORABLE BATTLES IN
ENGLISH HISTORY," &c., &c.

"I was a sketcher then ;
See here my doing."—TENNYSON.

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MRS. RADCLIFFE.

A.D. 1764—1823.

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MRS. RADCLIFFE.

THE present age appears to have forgotten all that English fiction owes to Mrs. Anne Radcliffe. Yet much of the poetical and elevated character which distinguishes it from French fiction, is due to the impulse afforded by her admirable romances. It was she who first seized upon the elements of fear and terror as aids to the development of a story ; she who first busied herself with the construction of a narrative whose excitement should irresistibly lead the reader from incident to incident ; she who first made scenery effective in the embellish-

ment of plot; and struck with bold and facile hand the most sensitive chords of the human heart. As Smollett and Fielding were the creators of the novel of "manners," so was Mrs. Radcliffe the creator of the romance; dealing with the supernatural, plunging into incredible horrors, traversing the gloom of pathless forests, wandering in the depths of Alpine defiles, or musing on the lonely shore of the haunted Mediterranean. She rescued fiction from the streets of the crowded city and the boudoirs of licentious beauties, to carry it into more picturesque localities, while she invented, or, at least, realised a different order of characters. Parson Adams, Commodore Trunnion, Clarissa Harlowe, Lady Bellaston—disappeared from the stage, and a strange weird world opened upon the English reader. The favourite heroes of the new romance were bandits and priests, feudal barons, the heroes of chivalry, the denizens of ruined manor-houses, and the captains of ferocious condottieri. Thus, the mind was removed from the sphere of the actual into that of the ideal, and a tone of passion and sentiment which was new to the English novel im-

posed upon the imagination and charmed the fancy. There is a tendency in each one of us to release ourselves from the trammels of the every-day world, and to indulge in flights more or less extravagant into the fairy realms of romance. And it is one of the greatest gifts of our nature—this capability of creating new worlds which shall contain all that is beautiful and wonderful, mysterious and ideal. As each individual possesses more or less of the poetic faculty, those who can form but dimly and rarely their own conceptions of love and grace, may, at least, enjoy the tender or marvellous conceptions of more gifted minds. To this love of the wonderful and supernatural, Mrs. Radcliffe appealed, and her works became the precursors of a large and important school.

Mrs. Radcliffe was, however, a consummate artist, and developed her effects with marvellous skill. She did not accumulate horror upon horror, until the appetite became satiate with excess—like too many of her followers and imitators—but gradually led forward the imagination; conducted it from step to step, until

she conceived it to be duly prepared for the terrible dénouement. She guides you, as it were, through a dim and mysterious corridor, the gloom increasing as you advance, and the distant echoes arousing fresh sensations of fear and awe, until, at length, you are introduced to the fatal arena where the last scene of the tragedy is to take place, with your imagination wrought up to the highest pitch of expectation. It is as if a traveller made his way through the deep recesses of a shadowy forest, passing from partial light into obscure shadow, and thence into silent darkness, until suddenly he broke out into the twilight upon the marge of a storm-tost sea. A sense of pain and impatient terror informs every page; and it is with throbbing brow and beating heart that you hurriedly gather up the details of the fascinating story. The magician transports you from the sleek decencies of every-day life into a region of wonder—a land of enchantment, and you yourself are affected by the spells which everywhere surround you.

As an instance of this peculiar power, let us point to her description of Emily and Montoni's

approach to the Castle of Udolpho : it impresses you at once with the conviction that some undefinable horror lies in your way, and that you are about to be plunged in the heart of a weird and sublime mystery.

“Towards the close of day, the road wound into a deep valley. Mountains, whose shaggy steeps appeared to be inaccessible, almost surrounded it. To the east a vista opened, and exhibited the Apennines in their darkest horrors ; and the long perspective of retiring summits rising over each other, their ridges clothed with pines, exhibited a stronger image of grandeur than any that Emily had yet seen. The sun had just sunk below the tops of the mountains she was descending, whose long shadow stretched athwart the valley ; but his sloping rays, shooting through an opening in the cliffs, touched with a yellow gleam the summits of the forest that hung upon the opposite steeps, and streamed in full splendour upon the towers and battlements of a castle that spread its extensive ramparts along the brow of a precipice above. The splendour of these illumined objects was heightened by the

contrasted shade which involved the valley below.

“ ‘Here,’ said Montoni, speaking for the first time in several hours, ‘is Udolpho.’ ”

“ Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle, which she understood to be Montoni’s ; for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object. As she gazed, the light died away on its walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper as the thin vapour crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipped with splendour. From these, too, the rays soon faded, and the whole edifice was invested with the solemn duskiness of evening. Silent, lonely, and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all who dared to invade its solitary reign. As the twilight deepened, its features became more awful in obscurity, and Emily continued to gaze till its clustering towers were alone seen rising over the tops of the woods, beneath whose thick shade the carriages soon after began to ascend.

“The extent and darkness of these tall woods awakened terrific images in her mind, and she almost expected to see banditti start up from under the trees. At length the carriages emerged upon a heathy rock, and soon after reached the castle gates, where the deep tone of the portal bell, which was struck upon to give notice of their arrival, increased the fearful emotions that had assailed Emily. While they waited till the servant within should come to open the gates, she anxiously surveyed the edifice; but the gloom that overspread it allowed her to distinguish little more than a part of its outline, with the massy walls of the ramparts, and to know that it was vast, ancient, and dreary. From the parts she saw, she judged of the heavy strength and extent of the whole. The gateway before her, leading into the courts, was of gigantic size, and was defended by two round towers, crowned by overhanging turrets, embattled, where, instead of banners, now waved long grass and wild plants that had taken root among the mouldering stones, and which seemed to sigh, as the breeze rolled past, over the desolation around

them. The towers were united by a curtain, pierced and embattled also, below which appeared the pointed arch of a huge portcullis surmounting the gates ; from these the walls of the ramparts extended to other towers, overlooking the precipice, whose shattered outline, appearing on a gleam that lingered in the west, told of the ravages of war."

Surely such a castle as this can only be the scene of mysterious events ! How well the gloomy mountains, the deepening twilight, and the mouldering walls contribute to the effect of the picture, and with what an impressive vagueness the whole is painted ! A writer of to-day would have entered into minute architectural details, and sketched an imaginary history of the old feudal pile from the days of the kings of the Lombards through all the vicissitudes of Italian annals. But Mrs. Radcliffe fully understood the advantage to be gained by generalizing her landscapes, by clothing them in that aerial and misty splendour which you may see on the canvass of Turner. " Her best descriptions," says Miss Kavanagh, ably, " with the accessory figures, remind us of

such paintings as the old masters delighted in. You see lovely valleys, hazy mountains, clear sheets of water, sunlit castles and noble trees ; they are true, but not real ; they belong to that unknown world of the mind which is to our daily thoughts what fairy-land was formerly to earth. The contemplation of these splendid images is delightful, but if you refer to the catalogue or the guide-book, you learn that you have been looking at a flight into Egypt, or at an hermitage in the forest, and that the specks of colour you had disregarded are the sacred or romantic personages referred to. Such are her landscapes, and such, too, her characters, good or evil—mere lay figures. She probably felt it herself, and supplied the deficiency with images more lively than scenery, however grand or melancholy—images of terror ; but whatever she wrote, whether she described an ideal Sicily, Venice rising from the sea, or tormented us with gloomy halls and the horrors of a veiled picture, Mrs. Radcliffe painted.”

She was a poet without the power of rhythm ; a poet in feeling and conception, but not in expression. The voiceless thought was

sheathed like a sword. She lacked the profound sentiment and rich fancy of the poet, but she possessed his pictorial capacity, his command over sublime and attractive images, his strong influence over, and sympathy with, the supernatural and undefinable. There are landscapes in her works as gorgeous as Byron ever painted; thoughts bright and lustrous as Orient pearls; and similes whose intense beauty and admirable fitness you at once acknowledge. She has a fine feeling for nature; can show you the waterfall shimmering against a background of dark pines; the dewy wildernesses of the forest, echoing with song; the groves and the lofty mountains of Friuli, and the distant ocean steeped in the silver moonlight. She has, moreover, the suggestiveness of the poet, and her pictures awaken an endless succession of fancies which linger in the mind with immortal beauty. We do not think you can read her marvellous romances without imbibing a strange affection for the things of which they are composed, just as Hazlitt owed to her magic page his love of the night and the moon, of mouldering towers, and the autumnal

woods. We confess that their influence has affected our tastes and sympathies, and that our partiality for the haunted gallery and the feudal castle dates from our perusal of the “Mysteries of Udolpho.”

Anne Ward was born in London of respectable parents, on the 9th of July, 1764. She was descended from one of the celebrated De Witts of Holland, who had come to England before our civil wars to reclaim the Lincolnshire fens—a work which the civil wars prevented. Her education was plain, but somewhere or other she gathered up stores of knowledge which none suspected, and which afterwards served her well. In person she was short, but admirably proportioned, and she possessed the gorgeous gift of beauty—that gift “twice blessed,” which blesses her who owns and those who admire it. Her complexion was exquisitely pure; her mouth very sweet and graceful; her eyes were dark and full of life and feeling. She had, moreover, a sweet voice—a marvellous thing in woman—and sang with taste and expression.

In 1787, at the age of twenty-three, Anne

Ward was married to Mr. William Radcliffe, an Oxford graduate, and a student of law, who afterwards became editor and proprietor of a weekly paper, *The English Chronicle*. His admiration of her personal graces did not prevent him from discerning and appreciating her rare mental powers, and he encouraged her to test them in the labour of composition. As the management of the journal often occupied him in the evening till a late hour, Mrs. Radcliffe employed her solitude in rendering into words the splendid pictures conceived by her imagination. She wrote rapidly, and her husband on his return would often be surprised by the amount of work she had accomplished. He found greater matter for wonder in its quality, and many of the chapters which flowed from her fertile and original fancy he did not dare to read alone in the dim and silent night.

Her first book, published in 1789, was entitled "The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne," and though far inferior to its successors, gave evidence of that strength of wing which was to enable her genius afterwards to adven-

ture such bold and daring flights. In the following year appeared "The Sicilian Romance," and at once convinced the public that a writer of great power and originality claimed their suffrages. Its magnificent pictures of scenery and romantic series of adventures excited a curious sensation in a reading world accustomed to the elegant puerilities of Walpole and Clara Reeve. "The Romance of the Forest," appeared in 1791, and deepened the impression produced by its predecessor. Sheridan and Burke, Fox and Pitt, critic and statesman, poet and man of letters were now as ready as the public to recognize the marvellous powers of Mrs. Radcliffe. It was seen that this new and daringly original writer did not seek for interest in the vulgar sources which had contented former novelists. She loved to alarm the soul even to a paroxysm of terror, and to excite it by the half-developed, half-concealed presence of perils always on the verge of bursting, like a long brooding storm, whose approach is heralded by days of darkness and wind-swept nights. The scenes which she chose for the display of her tragedies were likewise new to an English

public ; old towers shattered by time, long dark corridors haunted by mysterious echoes, forests impervious to the light of day, and dungeons tenanted by memories of crime and suffering.* The characters in the drama were not unworthy of these gloomy accessories. Their singular and nefarious schemes were as shadowy as they were criminal. They seemed to belong to some far off world of sorrow and crime, and borrowed from the unknown an undefinable sentiment of secrecy and awe.

The most popular of Mrs. Radcliffe's novels, and as a work of art the most perfect, was "The Mysteries of Udolpho," published in 1794. We feel assured that no one ever read this wonderful book—as unique in its way as Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe"—and forgot it. There are obvious faults in almost every page—errors of construction and even of taste—but the absorbing interest of the story, and the terrible grandeur of its incidents, prevents you from dwelling upon them. It is a book only to be read with gasping breath, with a shudder-

* Mrs. Barbauld, (*British Novelists.*)

ing strength of unrevealed horrors; just as when sitting alone in a darkened chamber you wait the opening of the door with an anxiety you cannot overcome.

Scott remarks upon its evident superiority to "The Romance of the Forest." Its interest, he says, is of a more agitating and tremendous nature; the scenery of a wilder and more terrific description, the characters distinguished by fiercer and more gigantic features. Montoni, a lofty-souled desperado, and captain of condottieri, stands beside La Motte and his Marquis, like one of Milton's fiends, beside a witch's familiar. "Adeline is confined within a ruined manor-house, but her sister heroine, Emily, is imprisoned in a huge castle like those of feudal times; the one is attacked and defended by bands of armed banditti, the other only threatened by constables and thief-takers. The scale of the landscape is equally different; the quiet and limited scenery of the one work, forming a contrast with the splendid and high-wrought description of Italian mountain grandeur which occur in the other."

About this time, Mrs. Radcliffe and her

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husband made a journey through Holland and the western provinces of Germany, of which she published an account in 1795, adding to it a picturesque narration of a tour in the lake-scenery of England. As might be expected, her sketches are distinguished by richness of colour, as well as accuracy of outline. *

The "Mysteries of Udolpho" had brought her the large sum of £500; for her next work, "The Italian," she received £800. It not only displays her peculiar power of exciting the passions, and inventing a series of skilfully concealed incidents, but a faculty of strongly conceiving and portraying character, which she had not formerly displayed. "Schedoni the Monk," is a fine and perfect conception, and has been the prototype and model of every villain in our later literature; while to Byron it suggested his "Giaour," "Corsair," and "Lara." It is proof of the excellence Mrs. Radcliffe might have attained in the highest art of the novelist, if she had cared to develop all her forces.

"The Italian" was Mrs. Radcliffe's last

published work. Her husband had received a legacy from some relations, which, added to their savings, enabled them to retire from active life, and to occupy themselves in her especial pleasure—travelling. She went from length to breadth of England, visiting its hallowed places, and famous shrines. But she published nothing more. Whether she was content with the reputation she had acquired, or whether she felt that she could not surpass her grand conception of Schedoni, she made no further attempt to gratify the reading world. She continued to write, however, and after her death was published the romance of “Gaston de Blondville,” in which she had attempted to blend the characteristics of her own, with those of the Walter Scott school; “Saint Alban’s Abbey,” a poem of some merit; and various minor pieces.

During the latter years of her life, Mrs. Radcliffe suffered from spasmodic asthma, and it was an attack of this disease which at last carried her off, on the 7th of February, 1823, in the 59th year of her age, after a few weeks’ illness. Her end was happy, for she passed

away in sleep, without a sigh or groan. Her remains were interred in a vault of the chapel-of-ease at Bayswater, belonging to St. George's, Hanover Square.

We propose to conclude this hasty sketch of the literary career of a remarkable woman, with a summary of Monsieur Le Fèvre Deumier's admirable criticism upon her writings.* It will at least convince the English reader of the estimation in which they are held by a foreign critic well acquainted with our literature.

The mission of the romance, he says, is to elevate us above the pre-occupation of actual life, into another and an ideal existence; whether it be one which we desire, or one which we are more likely to dread; presenting to our hopes a fate which make us forget our sorrows; offering to our fears a misery which reconciles us with our own. Mrs. Radcliffe, however, has adopted a different course. She leads us into countries

* *Etudes Biographiques et Littéraires*. We do not translate, however; we only profess to give an outline of M. Deumier's remarks.

of her own imagination, which resemble Nature as much as the pictures of Martin might do, were they warmed into life by the power of magic. Sometimes she divines the land of our dreams in order to conduct us thither; more often she delights to mislead our fancies. It is not this world which she paints, but a world purely imaginary, which has the features of our own, but different from it; nevertheless sufficiently to divert and beguile us.

The "situations" developed by the romancist are not usually such as we ourselves should desire; they are terrible situations which check the breath and freeze the blood. She knows, however, the exact limits to which she dare stretch her power, and soothes our anxiety by an indefinable presage of eventual happiness which reassures the heart by consoling the mind. Or else it is that the adventures which she narrates are so far removed from the ordinary track of common life, that they do not alarm our self-consciousness; or they result in so much happiness, that we willingly accept the experiences which lead to it. Her images succeed one another with such rapidity, that fear al-

though violent, has not time to become a torment.

We may see that the imitators of Mrs. Radcliffe, in following up her powers of composition, have unfortunately, as is usually the case with imitators, spoiled what they have taken. They transport us, like her, into a world which has never existed, but it is an impossible and chaotic world, with nothing of vitality in it. It is not a poet's dream, but an hideous night-mare; its creators do not excite our terror, but our disgust. They deal with vulgar crimes, and elaborate every detail until the heart grows sick and the brain weary. "They never meet with a sewer which they do not empty into their inkstands, and gradually pour out in filthy abundance over their pages." Such is not the case with the authoress of "The Mysteries of Udolpho." The atmosphere is fresh and pure of the world which her genius creates and embellishes.

Mrs. Radcliffe is essentially a painter. Her monuments, her landscapes, have a character of their own. Like all colourists, she only occupies herself secondarily with design. When

we have seen the places she describes, it is rarely that we can recognize them. When we have not seen them, we can figure them beforehand with marvellous facility. The Italy which she shows us is not the Italy we have visited, or shall ever see ; it is the Italy which we dream of at our fireside, the Italy we wish to visit. Take, for instance, her description of the Sicilian Castle of Mazzini, and the country which it rules—of the Bay of Naples, and the shore of Pausilippi, in the “Confessional of the Black Penitents.” This is neither Naples, nor Sicily, but it is full of charm, warmth, and light ; it breathes of the south. It is not what we should see if we wandered thither, but it is what we expect to see ; and little can it matter to us whether the pictures are faithful, if they make us think, if they fill our minds with pleasant fancies, and amuse our imaginations with splendid dreams. And it is to the intellectual rather than the physical eye, that Mrs. Radcliffe addresses herself, for she understood the capacities of her art, and that the pen, after all, should not attempt to rival the artist’s brush.

“ In showing himself more adventurous,” says

M. Deumier, "Scott has perhaps been less fortunate. When he wishes, in one of his poems, to represent to us Lake Katrine, he intends it shall be that lake and no other. He deceives himself. It is a sort of lake, a conventional lake, which each person enlarges, confines, or alters for himself; and generally sees very badly, because he seeks to tread in the footsteps of the artist. Poetry embarrasses you by the multiplicity and minuteness of its details. You do not know how to dispose of them in your mind; and when you attempt to classify them, it only follows that this image after nature is, like those of Mrs. Radcliffe's, but a fantasy of the imagination. She, however, busies herself only with masses, and her pictures are more grandiose and more indefinite. They captivate the more that they do not require to be exact. The more general they are, the more easily we retain them. Mrs. Radcliffe is a painter who works like a poet; Scott is a poet who wishes to be a painter."

In the execution of her portraits, the manner of Mrs. Radcliffe often recalls very felicitously that of Rembrandt. She lights up her person-

ages mysteriously, and only shows them in a misty, doubtful splendour, which irritates curiosity, and increases the interest that she wishes to throw around them. Scott, in his admirable criticism upon her works, has quoted several examples of this peculiar talent; and as he especially commends her portrait of the monk Schedoni, (in "The Italian,") we may reproduce it here :—

"His figure was striking, but not so from grace. It was tall, and though extremely thin, his limbs were large and uncouth; and as he stalked along, wrapt in the black garments of his order, there was something terrible in his air, something almost superhuman. His cowl, too, as it threw a shade over the livid paleness of his face, increased its severe character, and gave an effect to his large melancholy eye, which approached to horror. His was not the melancholy of a sensible and wounded heart, but apparently that of a gloomy and ferocious disposition. There was something in his physiognomy extremely singular, and that cannot easily be defined. It bore the traces of many passions, which seemed to have fixed the features they

no longer animated. An habitual gloom and severity prevailed over the deep lines of his countenance, and his eyes were so piercing that they seemed to penetrate, at a single glance, into the hearts of men, and to read their most secret thoughts; few persons could support their scrutiny, or even endure to meet them, twice. Yet, notwithstanding all this gloom and austerity, some rare occasions of interest had called forth a character upon his countenance entirely different; and he could adapt himself to the tempers and passions of persons whom he wished to conciliate with astonishing facility, and generally with complete triumph."

This mysterious Schedoni was evidently the original of the gloomy heroes which figure on Byron's lurid canvass. Thus, in his portrait of the Corsair it is easy to identify the same striking features :—

" Unlike the heroes of each ancient race,
Demons in art, but gods at least in face,
In Conrad's form seems little to admire,
Though his dark eyebrow shades a glance of fire.

Robust but not Herculean—to the sight
No giant frame sets forth his common height ;
Yet, in the whole, who paused to look again,
Saw more than marks the crowd of vulgar men ;
They gaze and marvel how, and still confess
That thus it is, but why they cannot guess.
Sunburnt his cheek, his forehead high and pale,
The sable curls in wild profusion veil ;
And oft perforce his rising lip reveals
The haughtier thought it curbs, but scarce conceals.
Though smooth his voice, and calm his general mien,
Still seems there something he would not have seen :
His features' deepening lines and varying hue
At times attracted, yet perplexed the view ;
As if within that murkiness of mind
Work'd feelings fearful and yet undefined.
Such might it be—that none could truly tell—
Too close inquiry his stern glance would quell.
There breathes but few whose aspect might defy
The full encounter of his searching eye.
He had the skill, when cunning's gaze would seek
To probe his heart and watch his changing cheek,
At once the observer's purpose to espy,
And on himself roll back his scrutiny."

Still more exact is the resemblance between
Schedoni and the Giaour :—

"Dark and unearthly is the scowl
That glares beneath his dusky cowl :•

The flash of that dilating eye
Reveals too much of times gone by ;
Though varying, indistinct its hue,
Oft will his glance the gazer rue,
For in it lurks that nameless spell,
Which speaks, itself unspeakable,
A spirit yet unquell'd and high,
That claims and keeps ascendancy ;
And like the bird whose pinions quake,
But cannot fly the gazing make,
Will others quail beneath his look,
Nor 'scape the glance they scarce can brook."

One more quotation :—

" See, by the half-illumined wall
His hood fly back, his dark hair fall,
That pale brow wildly wreathing round,
As if the Gorgon there had bound
The sablest of the serpent-braid
That o'er her fearful forehead stray'd.
Lo, mark ye, as the harmony
Peals louder praises to the sky,
That livid cheek, that stony air
Of mix'd defiance and despair !"

The touch of Mrs. Radcliffe is not less bold and effective, when, instead of persons, she is sketching the scenes where they reside or the countries they traverse. She imprints upon

her landscapes the same tint of mystery and marvel which clothes her actors, and she knows how to make them live in the thought, without investing them with too precise and definite a form. We have already given an example of this remarkable power from the "Mysteries of Udolpho," in which the elements of gloom and melancholy predominate. We take from "The Italian" a picture of a different character, a delicious landscape bathed in airy splendour and resonant with song.

"As, on their return, they glided along the moonlit bay, the melodies of Italian strains seemed to give enchantment to the scenery of its shore. At this cool hour, the voices of the vine-dressers were frequently heard in trio, as they reposed, after the labour of the day, on some pleasant promontory, under the shade of poplars, or the brisk music of the dance from fishermen on the margin of the waves below. The boatmen rested on their oars while their company listened to voices modulated by sensibility to finer eloquence than it is in the power of art alone to display; and at others, while they observed the airy, natural græce which dis-

tinguishes the dance of the fishermen and peasant girls of Naples. Frequently, as they glided round a promontory, whose shaggy masses impended far over the sea, such magic scenes of beauty were unfolded, adorned by these dancing groups on the bay beyond, as no pencil could do justice to. The deep, clear waters reflected every image of the landscape; the cliffs branching into wild forms, crowned with groves whose rough foliage often spread down their steeps in picturesque luxuriance; the ruined villa, on some bold point, peeping through the trees; peasants' cabins hanging on the precipices, and the dancing figures on the strand—all touched with the silvery tint and soft shadows of moonlight. On the other hand, the sea, trembling with a long line of radiance, and showing in the clear distance the sails of vessels stealing in every direction along its surface, presented a prospect as grand as the landscape was beautiful."

This is the Naples which every one of us imagines in our poetical youth, but it is not the Naples which travellers describe. Nevertheless, the landscape is full of beauty, and steeped

n that *chiaroscuro* which we are accustomed to admire on the canvass of Turner and Claude.

But what is still more worthy of notice in the genius of this author, is the skill with which she puts external nature in harmony with the motions of the soul, or the soul in harmony with the spectacles which affect it. Her trees, her ruins, her rocks, her mountains, speak, as it were, the language of your heart, and understand what you yourself say. Her flowers have the same familiar genius as your own. You read in your clouds that which she had read in hers. Her sympathy with nature is so intense that she peruses its very secret, and she has the faculty of interpenetrating the reader's mind with the knowledge that she thus has gained.

But with whatever attractiveness the roman-cist may prepare her scenes, her art requires of her something more. There is need, in a romance, of something else than striking pictures, as in a drama of something more than spectacle. There is a fable to relate, situations must be combined, incidents contrived,

the interest developed and sustained. In this branch of her art, Mrs. Radcliffe has had few superiors. None knew better than she did how to awake the attention and stimulate the curiosity, to suspend or slacken the progress of the action. None have more skilfully touched that chord of superstition which lies latent in every heart, or made better and more effective use of all the machinery of the supernatural. As Macbeth beholds even before him the "blood-bolter'd" spectre of Banquo, so the reader of Mrs. Radcliffe's romances sees constantly a spirit; dreads without intermission a horror, which never appears, but is always visible.

It is to be regretted, indeed, that she trifles with the command of the marvellous, and devotes the last chapter of her book to a tame explanation of the wonders that have so vividly affected the reader's imagination. It is just as if Macbeth were told that Banquo's spectre was only Professor Pepper's Ghost! She weakens the effect of her genius by rendering an unnecessary interpretation. The fountain sparkles and glows; she tells us it is supplied from the

neighbouring waterworks. The blood upon Tacduff's sword she bids you observe is only red ochre. Thus, for example—as Mr. Dunlop remarks—“after all the wonder and dismay, and terror and expectation excited by the mysterious chamber in the Castle of Udolpho, how much are we disappointed and disgusted to find that all this pother has been raised by a waxen statue!” The ingenuity with which she contrives her incidents so as to render an explanation possible excites our admiration, but we wish, nevertheless, that she left us to our enjoyment of the supernatural, and did not disturb our wondering ignorance. We have felt no exquisite pleasure in being horrified, that we are vexed to find the horror was entirely gratuitous.

It is impossible, however, to take up a volume of Mrs. Radcliffe without finishing it “all at a breath.” This is at once her highest praise and best criticism. It is a homage to her genius which both the grave Warton and the witty Sheridan, men so unlike in character and temperament, equally rendered. Fox himself, after a difficult and protracted debate, confessed

that he had passed the remainder of the night in reading the "Mysteries of Udolpho." He would not have found the same oblivion of self in the perusal of "Pamela" or "Tom Jones." The novels of Fielding or Smollett, despite their obvious merits, we can take up or put down at any time, without doing violence to our imagination; but, "these histories, full of trap-doors which rise up, and caverns which open wide, where one is always upon the *qui vive*, where one constantly expects to meet with a phantom or a secret treasure, will not spare you a moment till you have persevered to the end. They enchain you with the spell of an irresistible magic, and force you to explore, like their heroines, who boldly desire to see everything, even into their furthest recesses their labyrinths of mystery and terror."

Matthias, the author of the once popular satire of "the Pursuits of Literature," who, in reference to tales of wonder,

"Boasts an English heart,
Unused at ghosts or rattling bones to start,"

nevertheless does justice to Mrs. Radcliffe's

skill in composition, and pays a willing tribute to her surprising genius. There are, he says, women of talent, wanting neither in ability nor invention, who amuse themselves by weaving a tissue of improbable adventures which turns the heads of young girls; they even affect, here and there, a taint of ridiculous democratic opinion. It is not thus with the powerful magician of "the Mysteries of Udolpho," nourished and cradled by the Florentine Muses in the allowed and silent sanctuary of their solitary caverns, near the pale altars of Gothic superstition, and in the midst of the sacred terror of enchantments. She is a muse whom Ariosto would have delightedly recognized as

"La nudrita
Damizella Trivulzia al sanro speco."

In language of greater discrimination but equal eulogy writes William Hazlitt, than whom no English critic ever possessed a keener acumen or more liberal sympathy. He declared that he loved the romances of Mrs. Radcliffe,

and thought more often of them than of many works of a superior school. That what he felt when he saw the moon fill with its lustre the vast azure of heaven, when he heard the wind sigh through the dead leaves of autumn, when he paced the echoing vaults of a mediæval ruin, he owed to repeated perusals of "The Romance of the Forest," or "The Mysteries of Udolpho." While accusing her of vague and diffuse descriptions, of abusing the moonlight as an effect even to the point of wearying the reader, of the unreality of her characters, which are but the shadows of a shade, and whose complete identity is conspicuous in every novel, he confesses that she is unrivalled in the art of throwing the soul into incredible trances, and of agitating the mind with fits of hope or terror. She excelled, he says, in describing the indefinite, in clothing phantoms with an actual and visible form. She gave

"To airy nothings
A local habitation and a name."

She renders her readers for a second time

children, and like children, curious and credulous. Thanks to the fantastic twilight in which she envelops some of her agents, she compels us to yield our faith to all that their mysterious invention may possess of strange and impossible. The slightest circumstance, a sound, a whisper, a shadow, whatever she evokes, seizes immediately upon our senses. Whether it be the tender and plaintive sound of a lute, borne in gentle undulations along the winding coasts of Provence, recalling by its magic some friendship long since lost, or some hopeless love; or whether, in the depths of their cloister, a choir of monks are chanting their nocturnal litanies; here, in her thoughtful cell, the solitary song of a poor recluse, like the distant murmurs of an angel's harp; here, the sighs escaped from a tower, falling suddenly upon the startled ear; or, elsewhere, the sombre apparition of figures almost supernatural, an assassin hiding his features under the monastic cowl, a brigand gliding at night through the fearful obscurity of the woods,—all that power of fascination, says Hazlitt, which links to the world of the unknown the inexplicable world of passion, is hers; she

makes use of it, and plays with it, at her pleasure. She possesses all the poetry of romance; all that it has, in the imagination, of the obscure, the abstract, and the visionary, makes a part of her glorious realm.

We have said in the early part of this chapter that Mrs. Radcliffe was not a poet. She had, however, a considerable command of rhythm, and the following beautiful passage would seem to prove that with due cultivation, she might, at least, have obtained a foremost place in the second rank of female singers, if denied the first.

TO THE WINDS.

“ Spirit, who dwellest in the secret clouds,
Unseen, unknown, yet heard o’er all the world!
Who reign’st in storms and darkness half the year,
Yet sometimes lov’st, in summer’s season bright,
To breathe soft music through the azure dome;
Oft heard art thou amongst the high tree-tops
In mournful and so sweet a melody,
As though some angel, touched with human grief,
Soothed the sad mind.

“ Oh, voiceless, viewless Wind!
I love thy potent voice, whether in storms

It gives to thunder clouds their impulse dread,
Swells the Spring airs, or sighs in Autumn's groves,
Mourning the dying leaf. Whate'er the note,
Thy power entrances, wins me from low thoughts,
And bears me towards God, who bids you breathe,
And bids the morning of a higher world
Dawn on my hopes!"

With these lines may fitly conclude our notice of a woman who has enriched the literature of fiction with some admirably original compositions. She was the inventor of a new species of romance, as distinct from the mediæval legend in which figured enchanters and sorcerers, as from the tales of modern life which reproduce, with a fidelity often painful, the characters, passions, sentiments, and ideas of the present. She alone has known how to communicate all the interest of reality to the supernatural, and to charm the soul with an endless variety of dreamy and mysterious landscapes. She wrote for credulous Youth; not for busy manhood or sceptical old age, but earnest and imaginative Youth; the Youth that loves, and dreams, builds castles on the rainbow, and hears the voice of Ondine in the

murmurous brook. Ah, happy Youth! for which so much is reserved of the marvellous and beautiful; which knows how to open the golden gates of the enchanted land, how to master all the spells of the subtlest necromancers! Why ever grow old when the light and the love, the hope and the promise, are all for Youth? Why ever grow old, when it is for Youth that the fountain tinkles, the bird warbles, and the flower flings abroad its incense? Why ever grow old, when it is for Youth that the moonlight shimmers on the sea, the breeze whispers through the wood, and Ariel lurks—

“ Under the blossom that hangs on the bough !”

The blue eye melts in tenderness, the blush reddens on the virgin cheek, and the bashful smile lingers on the dewy lips—all for Youth! The lute sighs softly beneath the lattice, the clarion rings over the tented plain—all for Youth! Why, then, ever grow old? Let the limbs shrink, and the breath grow difficult, and the frost of years gather on the lessening curl, but still; why grow old? Keep, oh keep your heart young within you; nourish a constant

love for poetry and romance, which are the expression, by genius, of the true and beautiful, the tender and chivalrous, the *very elements* of youth ; look hopefully towards the future, while cherishing a gentle memory of the past ; and, perhaps—who knows?—Time may spare for you the freshness and dewiness of life, even unto the end ; and in soul, in brain, in heart, it may be you shall never grow old !

Authorities :—Life prefixed to Sir Walter Scott's Edition of her Works ; Miscellaneous works of Mrs. Radcliffe ; Hazlitt's Lectures on English Literature ; Etudes Biographiques, par Le Fèvre Deumier ; English Women of Letters, by Miss Kavanagh ; Dunlop's History of Fiction ; Mrs. Barbauld's British Novelists, &c.

THE DUCHESS DE LA VALLIÈRE.

A.D. 1644—1710.

MADemoiselle DE LA VALLIÈRE.

“ In every land
I saw, wherever light illumineth,
Beauty and anguish walking hand in hand
The downward slope to death.”

TENNYSON.

There are three distinct periods in the long history of Louis XIV., and these seem naturally to identify themselves with three famous women ;—the fair *Reines de la Main Gauche* who received in turn the homage of his passion. Thus, the youth and promise of his reign are typified in the bright beauty

and laughing loveliness of La Vallière; its splendour and triumphant glory in the matured charms of Madame de Montespan; its decay and shadow in the astute intellect and rigid devotion of Madame de Maintenon. And it must be acknowledged that Louis in his amours, more refined than his contemporary, Charles II. of England, sought for mental gifts no less than personal charms, and if caught at first by the eye, and the lip, the bloom of the cheek and the lustre of the hair, could only be held by the surer and more exquisite fascination of a clear judgment and a lively wit. He was not content with a dumb Venus. Beauty was required to wear the robe of Pallas, and to borrow some, at least, of the magical spells of the Graces. Criminal as were his attachments, and fatal to the heart and soul of his people by the general levity of manners and morals which they necessarily seemed to justify, they were clothed with a pomp and a refinement that concealed their most hideous features.

Louis was *le grand monarque* even with his mistresses; Charles II. was the valet

of his vulgarest courtézans. Vice at Versailles was decorous and dignified, went to mass with commendable regularity ; and almost shamed poor Virtue by the loftiness of its port and the graciousness of its mien. But at Whitehall it lounged about in a pitiful *deshabille* ; made friends with orange girls and actors ; trailed its robes of state in the kennel ; and turned the council chamber into a stage for the display of knaves and buffoons. The splendid and stately vice of Versailles was, however, more dangerous to France than the low debauchery of Whitehall to England. The one disgusted by its coarseness and brutality : the other allured by its orderly magnificence. And the sequence of the one was the revolution of 1688, a revolution demanded by a people proud of their freedom and attached to their religion ; of the other, the revolution of 1788, a revolution effected by a people impatient of oppression and demoralized with lust.* The heart of England

* This, to a certain extent, is superficial. Neither the English nor the French Revolution was wholly caused by the debauchery of the court ; but the character of the Revolution was affected by the character of the

remained sound and healthy in the presence of Charles II's profligacy; that of France was corrupted by the splendid character of Louis XIV's vices. England shrunk back from the shameless dissipation of the Stuart; France was enchanted by the graceful wickedness of the Bourbon.

The most romantic of Louis XIV's attachments was that which he professed for Mademoiselle de La Vallière. It was also the most popular, and the beautiful La Vallière is still the heroine of the people. A tale of passion, of guilt, sorrow, and penitence, it has had peculiar attractions for the popular mind, and while it has contributed poem, romance, and history to French literature, it has not been neglected by the English writer.

It certainly possesses the most striking features of romance. Consider the quality of the actors :

nation, and while France had followed, England had revolted against, the example set in high places. Hence English morality called in William the Third; French immorality invoked Danton. Marat. and Collot D'Herbois. •

a powerful sovereign, in the flush of youthful pride, contrasted with a young and simple maid of honour. Consider the startling variety of the passions: ardent, and aspiring love, triumphant possession, satiety on the one side and sorrow on the other, remorse, and a long repentance. Consider the picturesque character of the scenes:—the glittering pomp of a palace, the austere simplicity of a convent. And then there is thrown over the whole a bewildering atmosphere of splendour; nobles and pages, statesmen and beauties, priests and councillors—music and flowers, and the glow of a thousand lights—the fall of powerful ministers, the intrigues of subtle courtiers—all blend in the exciting movement of this passionate and fantastic drama. And yet it is an old, old story; the brief madness of love, the prolonged penitence of remorse. It is a fine commentary on the exultant sin—this dreary old age of shattered hopes that closes all!

In the early days of Louis XIV., there reigned at his Court three queens, each attended by a bevy of beauties—satellites revolving round a central star. The Queen, by right of power,

was the Queen-Mother, the shrewd and politic Anne of Austria ; the Queen, by right of place, was Maria Theresa, the young wife of the young king ; the Queen, by right of beauty, was the lovely bride of the king's brother, Henrietta of England, Duchess of Orléans. Each had her maids of honour—the fair scions of the noblest families of France ; but the fairest and noblest were those who clustered round *Madame*—a splendid garland of youth and loveliness. These were Mesdemoiselles de Sourdis, de Soyencourt, de Saint-Aignan, de Vardes, Montausier, de Bussi, de la Guiche, d'Attigny, and La Vallière—a graceful and gracious band, whose pleasant prattle every day was of the king and his nobles, of the deeds and poetry of love. When either of the fortunate beauties attained a marriageable age, Madame sought her a husband among the prowtest knights of the Court,—he who had distinguished himself in the combat and the carousal, wearing the device and the colours of the lady he discreetly loved. A dowry, if needful, was provided ; and the alliance was concluded under the auspices of the king.

Among these *filles d'honneur* was one who has attained by her sin, her sorrow, and her penitence, an immortal fame — Louise François de La Baume Le Blanc de La Vallière.

She was born in 1644, of a noble family which had been long established in Touraine. While yet a child she lost her father, and was brought up at Blois, in the household of Gaston of Orléans. No particulars have been preserved of her education, no anecdotes of her early years; but she was certainly gifted with more than ordinary talent, and is said to have cultivated her mind by assiduous reading.

In 1661, at the age of seventeen, she was introduced by Madame de Choisy to the Princess Henrietta of England, then newly married, and at once included among her *filles d'honneur*.* Of her personal appearance at this time we possess numerous descriptions. The Abbé de Choisy, who had been the confessor of her childhood, writes:—

“She was not one of those perfect beauties

* Mémoires de Mademoiselle de Montpensier.

whom one often admires without loving. She was *very* lovable, and the words of La Fontaine,

‘ Et la grace plus belle encore que la Beauté,’

seemed intended for her. She had a beautiful complexion, blonde hair, a sweet smile, azure eyes, with an expression so tender but at the same time so modest, that our affection and our esteem were gained at the same moment. Further, she had but little wit, but that she did not fail to cultivate continually by reading.”

Elizabeth of Bavaria, Duchess of Orléans, sketches a charming little woman :—

“ Her features,” she says, “ had an inexpressible attraction ; her figure was beautiful ; her appearance modest ; she limped a little, but this did not ill become her.” Her forehead was smooth and white, and on each side of it clustered abundant curls of a glossy auburn. The soft languishing eyes, the straight nose, the exquisite mouth, and the dimpled chin, with a certain eloquent air of love and

gentleness, made up a most fascinating countenance. Her neck was round and somewhat full, and her bust, with its swelling outlines, seemed a model for the sculptor. All the figure was firm and plump—not one of your angular forms that bristle with sharp points, but the shape of a Venus, rich in graceful curves, and softly rounded. There was a peculiar charm in her conversation ; it so sparkled with that light effervescing humour which in the mouth of a pretty woman is accounted wit, while it breathed an air of refinement that indicated a graceful and accomplished mind. A sweet temper and a gentle disposition won the affection of all her companions ; she was capable of a passionate love—a deep and unalterable love, devoted to its object, and utterly regardless of itself. She was not ambitious—except of being loved, and that is an ambition which a man willingly forgives to beauty. Envy and jealousy shrunk afar from her generous soul. Finally, La Vallière had all the softness, if she lacked the purity, of Imogen—the self-abandonment of Juliet—the passionate fidelity of Ophelia ; but Nature had rendered it impossible for her to play the

part of a Cleopatra. She was formed to yield, to obey, to suffer in silence; and the secret of her power lay in the simplicity of her devotion.

Such was la petite La Vallière, as her companions endearingly called her. You may see her portrait, by Petitot, in the Museum of the Louvre.

Let us now introduce to the reader the royal lover of La Vallière, who—such is the strange power of love!—is almost as well remembered by his share in her sorrowful story, as by all the glories of his reign, and all the splendour of his schemes of conquest.

Louis XIV., as the son of Anne of Austria, and the grandson of Marie de Médicis, had both Italian and Spanish blood in his veins; and derived from the one his chivalry of temper, which communicated a certain refinement and purity even to his vices, from the other his passionate love of women. His natural talents were so considerable, that though but little cultivated by his tutors, they were well adapted to the administration of a great kingdom. Personally, he was “every inch a king;” for while

his mind was neglected, great care was taken to render him perfect in every manly grace and exercise. He rode superbly ; danced exquisitely ; and was an accomplished swordsman. • His figure did not exceed a medium height, but his shoulders were broad, and his aspect full of dignity. He bore himself with an air of pride and yet of grace, that impressed every beholder, and possessed in perfection the great art of kings—of rendering his lightest nothings acceptable by the words which clothed them, and the manner in which they were uttered. Every compliment was as good as a victory. You felt rewarded for years of toil and suffering. His countenance was noble, generous, and frank ; it was lightly marked with the small-pox. His hair was dark almost to being black, and waved upon his shoulders in floating curls ; his eyes were brilliant, yet tender, his smile was fascinating ; he spoke slowly, but well, and his graceful and animated gestures energetically assisted his royal and measured eloquence.

Thus gifted by Nature, and placed at an early age on the throne of a powerful kingdom,

it is easy to understand that gradual deification of self which made him think and act as if he were the irresistible Jupiter of a new Olympus. He was assisted in this fatal delusion by the successes and glories of the opening years of his reign. The victories of Turenne and Luxembourg ; the genius of Racine, Corneille, Boileau, and Molière ; the policy of Colbert and Louvois, all seemed to radiate from this one supreme centre. His nod made the nations tremble ; there appeared no check to the projects of his ambition. It may almost be forgiven him if he thought himself superior to fortune ; and certainly his heroic patience in adversity half redeemed the ostentatious pride of his prosperity.

The young and handsome king entered upon his career of gallantry as soon as he could emancipate himself from the control of his preceptors. He was irresistibly attracted towards that part of the palace devoted to the apartments of the *filles d'honneur*, and their gouvernante, Madame de Noailles, found it difficult to oppose a successful resistance to his stratagems. Bolts and bars could not check

the enamoured monarch ; he climbed from the galleries to the balconies of Saint Germain, and there were not wanting kind hands to throw open the windows for his admission. .

His first transient attachment was for Mademoiselle Elizabeth de Ternan, but it resulted in nothing—a boyish affection which passed away, and left no trace behind it. Then, he bestowed his sighs upon Mademoiselle de la Motte d'Argencourt, but she was proof against the fascinations even of a king. His passion for Olympia de Mancini, the ambitious and beautiful niece of Mazarin, was more serious, and did not lack encouragement from its object. But the opposition of the Cardinal was fatal to it. As if his fancy grew warmer with each successive *amour*, he fell seriously in love with Olympia's sister, Marie de Mancini, who though she was positively ugly, obtained such a power over his heart by the subtle exhibition of what seemed an overmastering devotion, and so flattered his vanity by her apparently absorbing attachment to the man—not the king—that he was willing to have made her his wife. But Mazarin was aware of the evil consequences of

such a step, and aided by the queen-mother, who was strongly opposed to her son's predilection, prevailed upon him to sacrifice his passion to his reason. She was removed from Court on the 22nd of June 1659. The King himself conducted her to the carriage that was prepared to bear her away, and did not attempt to conceal his tears. The ambitious Marie made a last effort to overpower his judgment. "You weep," she said, "and yet you might command." But Louis had the self-control to sacrifice his passion to the exigencies of state policy; and having seen her depart, set out for Chantilly to bury his grief and his love in solitude.

It was not long before he recovered his composure, and his fickle fancy was then attracted by the surpassing loveliness of Henrietta of England, the daughter of Charles I, which he had before refused to acknowledge. Nor was that proud and ambitious beauty unwilling to accept his homage. But fate and policy determined otherwise, and to chain the ardent gallant, he was married to the estimable Maria Theresa, daughter of the King of Spain.

Henrietta in her turn was wedded to Philip, Duke of Orleans, who, neither in person nor mind, was calculated to render happy a woman of such ardent passions and so aspiring an intellect. The king's partiality survived this double marriage, but as his attentions began to excite the animadversions of the queen-mother and the jealousy of the Duke, as well as to wound the feelings of the queen, it was determined that Louis should enact the part of lover to some of the ladies of her household.

Louis and his confidants selected three goddesses, to one of whom this irresistible Paris might throw the golden apple. Mademoiselle de Pons was exceedingly handsome, but particularly foolish. Mademoiselle de Chemerault was not quite so handsome, but brilliantly clever; and Mademoiselle de la Vallière was fascinating, graceful, and gentle.* Mademoiselle

* To the descriptions already given of this celebrated lady, we may add the opinion of Madame de Motteville:—"Her beauty had great attractions, from the sparkling fairness and the vermeil of her complexion; the blue of her eyes, which were full of sweetness; and

de Pons was quickly removed from his attentions; De Chemerault, it is said, sinned and was forgotten; and at length the golden apple—a Dead Sea apple, alas!—fell to the unhappy La Vallière. The suit began in jest, ended in earnest; and Louis, instead of amusing himself with a pretended gallantry, was caught in the snares of an uncontrollable passion.

Louise de la Vallière was young, impressionable, loveable, and loving. The ardent attachment of the handsome and gracious king, if at first it did not conquer her virtue, quickly won her heart, and she took the best way of subduing his by permitting him to see how sincerely she loved him. It has been the fashion with most writers to represent her as a timid and blushing girl—a violet that shrunk into the

the richness of her auburn hair, which added to the loveliness of her countenance.” A contemporary, but anonymous writer, says, “She is of middling stature, but very small; she walks badly, because she is lame; she is a blonde, fair, marked with the small pox, has brown eyes; a look of languor yet of passion, and sometimes full of fire, joy, and wit; the mouth large, but rosy; her wit is brilliant, but solid, for she knows almost everything in history, with much vivacity,” &c., &c.

shade; but this modesty, while lending an additional charm to her romantic story, only exists in the imagination of romancist and poet. Like most girls of her age and rank, she was proud of the royal homage paid to her charms. She loved the king, and did not attempt to disguise her love. He sent to her some bracelets and ear-rings of great value, and she did not hesitate to wear them—significant symbols of her conquest—under the eyes of the Duchess Henrietta and her lively companions. She gloried in her shame, and did not shrink from its public avowal. Nor was Louis more reticent, so that the name of La Vallière and the story of their passion spread rapidly over all Europe, and she was the object of the flatteries, or the censures of all the French court.

In those amusing works which are usually ascribed to Bussy-Rabutin, will be found a curious and piquant narrative, purporting to be written by Henrietta of England, and exposing the artifices of the king and his lady-love. There, too, may be read the witty, but not over moral *Discours sur les Amours du Roi et de*

Mademoiselle de la Vallière. From the two we borrow a few interesting details.

First, Madame speaks—the beautiful, vain, and unhappy Henrietta. “The king,” she says, “often enough came to see me, complaining of the dullness of his court since the departure of Marie de Mancini, and the weary length of the days. Once, when he was more *ennuyé*d than usual, Roquelaure, to draw him from his reverie, bethought himself of making a jest of the attachment of one of my maids of honour for him, mimicking her and saying that she durst not see the king again for the sake of her heart’s repose. As Roquelaure could give a ridiculous air to everything he said, he succeeded very well in diverting the king. Some days afterwards, the king in leaving my chamber, saw Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente* pass. He said to Roquelaure, ‘I very much wish that it was she who loved me.’ ‘But it is this lady,’ replied Roquelaure, pointing out to him La Vallière, to whom at the same time he said, in a jesting tone, ‘Ah, come here, my beauty with the dying eyes, who

* Afterwards Madame de Montespan.

can love nobody less than a great monarch.' The raillery disconcerted La Vallière ; she could not recover from her embarrassment, though the king made her a grand salute, and spoke to her with the utmost civility. It is certain, however, that she made no impression upon him that day, though he would not allow her to be laughed at. Six days afterwards, he was more favourably inclined towards her. They conversed together for two hours in a very spirituel manner ; and it was this fatal conversation which ensnared him. As he was ashamed to visit her in my apartments without coming to see me, what did he do ? He found means to spread a rumour through all the court that he was enamoured of me, and as soon as he saw anyone approach, he posted himself at my side and whispered trifles in my ear. He would often get me upon the chapter of his Beauty, obliging me to tell him the least things about her ; and as I was pleased to amuse him, I discoursed upon this subject as much as he wished.

" The king came one evening with the queen-mother, who showed us a diamond brace-

let of exquisite beauty, in the centre of which was a miniature representing Lucretia. All of us, ladies that we were, would have given everything for this jewel. What good is it to dissimulate? I confess that I thought it was mine, for I neglected nothing to show the King that he might make me a very agreeable present. Louis took it from the queen's hands, and showed it to all my maids of honour. He addressed himself to La Vallière, telling her that we should all die of envy. She replied in a languishing and affected tone; and the king then besought his mother to exchange it with him. She gave it him with much joy. As soon as the king had gone, I could not refrain from telling all my ladies that I should be much astonished, if that jewel on the morrow did not adorn my neck. La Vallière blushed, and made no reply. A moment afterwards she left the room, and Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente followed her softly. She saw La Vallière examine the bracelet, kiss it, and then return it to her pocket. Returning, she perceived Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, and in her surprise, exclaimed

‘Mademoiselle, you now know the king’s secret; it is a very delicate thing; think of it more than once.’

“On the following day, the king came to see me. He spoke more than an hour to La Vallière. He wished at once to withdraw her from my roof, but she was unwilling. He desired her to put on ear-rings and her watch, and to enter my chamber in full dress, which she did. I asked her before the king who had given her all these presents: ‘I,’ replied the king, not very politely. But as the king wished that I should go to Versailles and conduct thither *that creature*, I waited to rebuke her before the queen. Assuredly Louis mistrusted me, and it was on this day he committed a rudeness towards all of us, by leaving us in the rain, to give his hand to La Vallière whose head he covered with his own hat.”

The princess, or the writer who assumes her mask, continues: “In the following week, the king and Mademoiselle de La Vallière went alone to Versailles, where they amused themselves as they chose for several days.. Return-

ing from thence to Paris, La Vallière fell from her horse. She would not have been much hurt, if she had not been the king's mistress, but it was thought necessary to bleed her promptly, and she wished it to be done in her foot. Twice the surgeon failed in the operation; the lover became as white as her linen, and wished to bleed her himself. She was obliged to keep her bed a month; and for this reason, the king deferred for two days his journey to Fontainebleau. On his return his joy was great, but the queen did not rejoice in the same manner. She had already had enough misery, without having to hear him almost every night dream aloud of his little *cateau* (kitten—chaton.) For it was thus the queen called La Vallière, because she did not understand very well the exact meaning of French words."

Much of this is undoubtedly apocryphal, but enough remains, when the exaggeration is put aside, to show that La Vallière, except at the outset, made no secret of her devotion to the king, nor he of his attachment to her. It lifts moreover, one cloud from the fame of Henri-

etta of England, for it is evident that Louis played the gallant towards his brother's wife to conceal his first emotions of love for her maid of honour. And Henrietta's pretended infatuation for the king was only the light and half-mocking fancy of a proud and beautiful woman, accustomed to admiration.

Still Louis, as yet in the flush and romance of manhood, was eager to throw over his first real passion an air of chivalrous enchantment. He involved "his love in the greatest mystery." All that was visible to the careless eye was the splendour of royal revelry. Fêtes and pageants were celebrated which by some hidden device reminded the beauty of the king's devotion; allegorical ballets were danced, in which Louis performed disguised, but was always to be distinguished by his superior grace and dignity. In the charming retreats of Versailles, its grottoes and bowers and shadowy alleys, he found ample opportunities for the cultivation of romantic surprises and the poetic side of love. Versailles was then a château of moderate size,—“more elegant perhaps than the sumptuous edifice of to-day, for, graceful and light,

it was preceded by a vast court, crowned and encircled by a gallery. In front, two handsome pyramids indicated the rendezvous of the hunt, according to the royal custom. In the rear extended a park, with a falconry and menagerie, that is to say, dogs of twenty species, ferrets, a pheasantry, caged falcons and merlins, and by their side some wild animals, caught in the snare on account of their beauty; the wolf, the wild boar, the fox, some old stags of unusual size, the eagle, and the vulture. Louis XIII., the hardest and most intrepid of hunters, delighted in the echoing horn, in distant courses. His was not the royal chase which afterwards Louis XIV. ordered, with its times of rest, its rendezvous appointed before hand, its premeditated morts, as if the free animals of the forests owed obedience to king, as well as his subjects! The hunts of King Louis XIII. were abrupt and broken, a violent unforeseen exercise, with musketoon, ferret and falcon, in the recesses of the densest forests.”*

The chase, however, was but a pretext with

* Capefigue, “Les Reines de la Main Gauche.”

the enamoured monarch for his frequent visits to the pavilion of Versailles, where, in mysterious trysts and secret conversation with the beautiful La Vallière, he enjoyed .

“The bloom of young desire, the purple light of love,”

and recalled, in his romantic devotion, the palmiest days of chivalry. Thither he fled from the tearful reproaches of his queen, who was then in an advanced state of pregnancy; from the dignified anger of Anne of Austria; from the mordant raillery of Henrietta of England. But love soon grows bold in the consciousness of possession, and Louis was already disposed to elevate La Vallière to a rank commensurate with his affection for her, when a series of events occurred to precipitate his resolution.

It is unnecessary to remind the reader of the power enjoyed, after the death of Mazarin, by Fouquet, the superintendant of the finances, who availed himself of his position to accumulate enormous wealth, and lavished that wealth in the display of the most ostentatious luxury.

the remonstrance of the queen-mother from committing so cruel a breach of the laws of hospitality. The anecdote is apocryphal, but it proves that a rumour existed of a rivalry between Louis and his minister for the affections of La Vallière. And, certainly, the fête at Vaux seemed intended for her glorification ; so especially was she the object of the king's homage and his courtiers' flatteries.

On this occasion, the fables of the Arabian nights were apparently realised. Canals and fountains shimmered and sparkled, and reflected at night a thousand torches ; the rarest flowers filled the gardens, which were adorned and diversified with the most enchanting bowers, long avenues of trees, winding shrubberies, brilliant parterres, grottoes, leafy walks, and terraces glittering with exquisite sculptures. The ball-room and the gaming-table offered amusement to different minds, and troops of comedians and musicians beguiled the fancy or charmed the ear.

“ Parmi la fraîcheur agréable
Des fontaines, des bois, de l'ombre et des zéphirs,
Furent préparés les plaisirs

Que l'on gouta dans la soirée,
 De feuillages touffues, la scène était parée
 Et de cent flambeaux éclairés
 Le ciel en fut jaloux ; enfin figure-toi
 Que lorsqu'on eût tiré les toiles ;
 Tout combattait à Vaux pour les plaisirs du roi ;
 La musique, les eaux, les lustres et les étoiles."

For this fête Pelisson had written a prologue. The Béjard, the haughty mistress of Molière, represented the Goddess of the Fountain who commanded her subject nymphs to come forth from the marbles that enclosed them, and contribute as far as they could to the amusements of the king. Immediately the statues became, as if by enchantment, fauns and bacchantes, who plunged into the graceful mazes of an allegorical ballet.

" Parut un rocher si bien fait
 Qu'on le crut un rocher, en effet,
 Mais insensiblement se changeant en coquille ;
 Il en sortit une nymphe gentille
 Qui ressemblait à la Béjard,
 Nymphe excellente dans son art."

Molière composed for this occasion his

satirical comedy of *Les Fâcheux*—for Molière and the Béjards were deeply indebted to the liberal patronage of Fouquet, who knew how to appreciate talent, and delighted in rewarding it. The best musicians of France provided the music, which alternated from strains of love to stirring flourishes of war. And such was the splendid pomp of Fouquet, that the courtier who retired from the gaming-table a loser, found on his dressing-table a purse of gold which amply compensated him for his losses.

Alas for all this ostentation and magnificence ! It was the prelude to the ambitious minister's fall. A fortnight later, (September 5th) he was suddenly arrested, and flung into prison. His trial followed, which was protracted over nearly two years. Found guilty of peculation, the king condemned him to imprisonment for life, and he died in captivity in 1680.*

* We have followed in the text the usual account, which represents La Vallière as present at the fête of Vaux, August 17th, or 20th, 1661, but it must be confessed that the tale is not entirely established. Mademoiselle de Montpensier speaks of the fête as occurring in 1660, between the 13th of July and 26th

II.

Romance and reality are so inextricably blended in the histories which have come down to us of the loves of La Vallière and Louis XIV., that it is almost impossible to say where the reality ends, where the romance begins.

Madame de Sévigné speaks of her as "that

of August, on which occasion the Queen attended. La Vallière did not arrive at court until after the marriage of Henrietta of England to the Duke of Orleans, (March 20, 1661,) when she was appointed one of the maids of honour. She could not, therefore, have figured at the fête so distinctly alluded to by Mademoiselle. On the other hand, Bussy Rabutin, and the Abbé de Choisy, both describe the festival of August 1661, and the Abbé, though given to gossiping, and relating apocryphal anecdotes, is usually correct in all his statements respecting La Vallière. Must we, then, conclude that two fêtes were given by Fouquet? This is not impossible; but then it would seem that the first was celebrated by La Fontaine, and not the second; for he certainly alludes to the presence of the Queen, and the Queen could not attend in August, 1661, being then in the sixth month of her pregnancy.

We may, however, reject without hesitation the

little violet which hid itself under the grass, and was ashamed of being a mistress, a mother, and a duchess." But we have already shown that, however obstinately she resisted the king's more violent passion, she neither disguised her own love, nor shrunk from the royal worship. While the Court was still at Fontainebleau, she unhappily yielded to the importunities of her lover; her heart, in spite of her virtue, seconding too well his ardent passion. It was necessary, however, to conceal the intrigue from the queen, and the two confidants of the lovers were the famous Beauvilliers, Count of Saint Aignan, and the astute Madame de Brancas.

incident of the King's displeasure at the picture of La Vallière as a later invention. Fouquet, already aware that Louis had some suspicions of his conduct, would scarcely have hazarded his anger by an open display of love for the royal mistress. And as between La Vallière's introduction at court, and the fête at Vaux, there intervened scarcely five months, we may reasonably infer that in so short a time the minister's licentious tastes could hardly have selected her as their object. Why, too, should the King be permitted to enter the cabinet where the lady's portrait was concealed?

But there were others who, at the least, were equally eager to reveal the king's secret, if it could be done without compromising themselves. Henrietta of England and the Countess of Soissons, both women of brilliant beauty, and more than ordinary ambition, were disgusted, as we have shown, with the preference accorded to the young maid of honour, and called to their aid the Count de Guiche, son of the Maréchal de Grammont, and the Marquis de Vardes, a courtier of lively wit and volatile principles. The latter prepared an epistle in French, which the Count de Guiche translated into Spanish, purporting to come from the Queen of Spain (Maria Theresa's step-mother), informing the queen of the connection between the king and La Vallière, and warning her to be upon her guard. The Spanish queen's penmanship was not so correctly imitated in the letter as on the cover, but the conspirators got it sent through the office of the Count de Brienne, secretary of state for foreign affairs, to Doña Maria Molina, Maria Theresa's Spanish attendant. The latter observed that its appearance was not *en règle*; that it was not folded like the Queen of Spain's

Marquis de Sourdis, repeated aloud, in a tone of astonishment, ‘What! La Vallière a nun!’ The king, who had caught the word, turned round, much moved, and enquired, ‘What is it?—tell me!’ The duke replied that La Vallière was in a nunnery at Chaillot.* Happily, the business of the ambassadors was dispatched, for in the transport into which the news hurried the king, he no longer possessed any consideration. He commanded that a carriage should be got ready, and without waiting, he immediately mounted his horse. The queen, who saw him set out, said to him, ‘that he was not master of himself.’ He replied, furiously, like a young lion:—‘If I am not of myself, Madame, I shall be of those who outrage me.’ Thus speaking, he departed, and rode at full speed to Chaillot, where he enquired for her; she came to the grate. ‘Ah!’ cried the king, weeping, ‘you care little for the life of those who love you.’ She wished to reply, but was hindered by her tears. He implored her to come forth quickly; she resisted, dwelling upon

* The Duke was mistaken. La Vallière had retired to the Benedictine convent of Saint Cloud.

the ill treatment she had received from Madame. At length, she said, lifting her eyes to heaven, 'one is very feeble when one loves, and I feel no longer strong enough to deny you.' She came forth, and placed herself in the carriage which the king had caused to be prepared for her. 'See,' said she, as she entered it, 'how all this ends!' 'No,' rejoined the king, enraged, 'I am king, thank God, and I will make it known to those who shall have the insolence to displease you.' "

According to some authorities, La Vallière was impelled to take this step through the sincerity of her penitence for the sin she had committed. She left the convent at the king's entreaty, but with tears and deep regret, exclaiming to the nun who opened the gate for her to go forth — "Farewell, my sister, you will soon see me again."

Madame de La Fayette, in her biography of "Henrietta of England," gives a very different, and apparently a very probable version. She represents La Vallière as being the confidante of Mademoiselle de Montalais, who was acquainted with Henrietta's *liaison* with the Count

de Guiche, and betrayed the secret to her friend, making her promise not to reveal it to the king. Louis, on the other hand, had obtained from his gentle mistress a pledge that she would never practice any concealment with him; and La Vallière being unused to deception, his sagacity, sharpened by jealousy, soon discerned that she was not fulfilling her promise. He taxed her with her fraud, but could not induce her to violate the trust Montalais had reposed in her. So it fell out that they parted in anger; and Louis not returning, the simple La Vallière in despair, fled from the Louvre at night, and found shelter and an asylum in the convent at Saint Cloud. Thither the king followed her, under the circumstances already detailed.

Louis had given to his mistress the Hôtel Brion, which he had furnished for her with the costliest magnificence. There he passed nearly every evening, and did not return to his palace until three in the morning. During these great disorders, the pious Duke de Mazarin demanded a private audience of the king. It was granted; and he then related a vision he had had; how that the kingdom would be upset if Louis

did not abandon La Vallière, and he warned him of it in the name of God.

“And I,” replied the king, “I warn you, for my part, to get your brain, which is in a pitiable condition, into a little order, and restore to the state all that your uncle the Cardinal robbed it of.”

The Jesuit Father Amat, the king’s confessor, instigated by the queens, had likewise an interview with Louis, and pretended that he wished to leave the court, hinting that he was horrified at the monarch’s connection with La Vallière. Louis laughed, and freely accorded him permission, and said, that thenceforth he would find a confessor in his curé. The queen-mother, as a last effort, supplicated him to consider the scandal caused by his licentiousness. Forgetting his usual respect for her, he replied angrily,

“What, Madame! are we to believe all that the world says? I think that you have more reason than most not to preach such a gospel!” Anne of Austria was struck dumb by this pointed allusion to her own supposed love-passages.

Certainly, if poetry or the drama could represent public opinion, Louis had no reason to think that his passion was disapproved by his subjects. But neither the poet nor the dramatist was then the exponent of popular feeling. The Court was their patrons; they derived their principal encouragement from the king; and as yet had not learned to appeal to that wider and nobler audience which now-a-days responds to their voices, and decides their fate by its suffrages. The great comic dramatist of France was "the king's servant;" and Molière therefore ridicules—with a wit which, it is true, amuses and delights its unconscious victims—the different orders of the people, and their vulgar household virtues. The cuckolded husband, the honest gentleman, the industrious burgess, the devout christian, receive in turn the fierce lash of his satire, and all his marvellous powers are employed upon the grand object of elevating vice and rendering virtue ridiculous. With a more fertile invention and a keener sense of humours, he adopts the same principles as Congreve, Farquhar and Wycherley, and a wife's adulteries or a knavish servant's

rogueries afford the material for some of his finest scenes. The *Tartuffe* is not so much a satire upon hypocrisy, as a covert attack upon religion ; and in a word, it may be asserted with considerable truth that not one of Molière's comedies was designed to subserve the interests of truth or morality. The same licentiousness pervades the works of La Fontaine ; and Boileau, and even Racine, if they did not praise adultery and idealize lust, devoted their powers to the inglorious purpose of deifying the king whose example seemed to legalize those vices. With Racine he was Alexander the Great, who called himself the son of Jupiter ; with La Fontaine he was actually the cloud-compelling God.

Jupiter, at length, disdained to conceal his passion for Alcmena, and La Vallière was openly established as the mistress of the king. He addressed her in sonnets which he either composed himself, or procured from his household minstrels—Benserade and Dangeau. He lavished upon her a profusion of gifts, which were truly royal in their costliness. But he desired a more brilliant and chivalrous method

of displaying his devotion, and resolved to give a grand carrousal or tournament in honour of the beautiful Louise. He chose for the scene of the spectacle the open area in front of the Tuileries, whose name still indicates the purpose to which it was devoted. There on the 5th of June, 1662, in the presence of Anne of Austria and Maria Theresa, and under the eyes of La Vallière, the king and his brilliant nobility displayed their address in a variety of chivalrous exercises. Five "quadrilles" represented the costume of five different nations : Louis himself rode at the head of the Romans ; Monsieur led the Persians ; the Prince de Condé the Turks ; the Duke d'Enghien the Indians ; and the Duke de Guise the Americans. The prizes were awarded to the successful competitors by the queen and queen-mother ; and contemporary writers record with enthusiasm the skill displayed by the gallants, the splendour of their costumes, and the martial character of the whole spectacle. It was a reproduction on a more splendid scale and in a more refined spirit of the chivalric fêtes of the days of Henri Quatre and Francis I.

A yet more graceful and brilliant festival was celebrated at Versailles on the 7th of May, 1664. An "enchanted island" was prepared in its magnificent gardens, and the episode of Alcine, as told by Ariosto and Boiardo, was selected for representation, under the title of "The Pleasures of the Enchanted Isle, divided into three days." The Italian Toalli undertook the task of decoration, and the manufacture of the pyrotechnical devices; Molière, with the company of the Bédards, composed the comic intermezzos. The first day was occupied with a carrousel, ostensibly presided over by Maria Theresa, though a post of so much prominence was given to La Vallière as clearly to indicate in her the true divinity of the fête. Louis, brilliant in a dress that was almost wholly composed of diamonds, represented the Roger of Ariosto in the charming isle of the syren Alcine; and Flora and Apollo, in chariots garlanded with flowers and drawn by nymphs, satyrs and dryads, hailed him with triumphal song as the victor in the tourney. Soft music swelled in the leafy thickets, where unseen musicians were artfully disposed, and the blaze

of lamps and torches flung a dazzling gleam upon the cascades and lighted up with fairy splendour the silver columns of the fountains. At the banquet, Time, the Hours and the Seasons, distinguished by appropriate symbols, waited upon the guests, who were sheltered in groves and bowers of roses and lilies of the valley—the favourite flower of Mademoiselle de La Vallière.

At the extremity of these alleys, upon a theatre of crisp green sward, was played, on the second day of the fête, a comedy written by Molière. In the *Princesse d'Elide* the amorous gallantries of Louis were the theme of the dramatist's flatteries. Thus, an old courtier is represented, saying :—

“Moi, vous blâmer, des tendres mouvements
Où je vois qu'aujourd'hui penchent vos sentiments,
Le chagrin des vieux jours ne peut aigür mon âme
Contre les doux transports de l'amoureuse flamme,
Et, bien que mon sort touche à ses derniers soleils,
Je dirai que l'amour sied bien à vos pareils ;
Que ce tribut qu'on rend aux traits d'un beau visage
De la beauté d'une âme est un vrai témoignage,
Et qu'il est mal aisé que sans être amoureux
Un jeune prince soit et grand et généreux,

C'est une qualité que j'aime en un monarque,
 La tendresse du cœur est une grande marque
 Que d'un prince à votre âge, on peut tout présumer
 Dès qu'on voit que son âme est capable d'aimer,
 Oui, cette passion, de toutes la plus belle
 Traîne dans son esprit cent vertus après elle,
 Aux nobles actions elle pousse les cœurs . .
 Et tous les grands héros ont senti ses ardeurs."

(*Translation.*)

*I blame thee, Sire, for those emotions sweet,
 Which, as I see, to-day thy joys complete?
 No: age shall ne'er my grieving heart inspire
 Against the transports blest of fond desire;
 And though my years to their last suns incline,
 I'll own that love becomes such souls as thine.
 The homage rendered to thy god-like face,
 Bears witness to thy mind's enchanting grace!
 Nor great nor generous can the sovereign be,
 That will refuse to Love his fealty.
 No better virtue can he e'er possess
 Than a true heart's surpassing tenderness.
 And let him once with love's sweet passion glow,
 We'll own that every gift he soon will show.
 A hundred virtues in its train it brings,
 For love will plume no solitary wings;
 To noble actions noble souls inspires,
 And every hero feels its glorious fires.*

The poet also alludes to the protracted resis-

tance of the modest La Vallière, whose device had always been, the huntress Diana in the woods :—

“ Un bruit vient cependant se répandre à ma cour
Le célèbre mépris qu'elle fait de l'amour,
On publie en tous lieux que son âme hautaine
Garde pour l'hyménée un invincible haine,
Et qu'un arc à la main, sur l'épaule un carquois,
Comme un autre Diane, elle hante les bois,
N'aime rien que la chasse, et de toute la Grèce
Fait soupirer en vain l'héroïque jeunesse.”

(*Translated.*)

Meanwhile, fond rumour to my court has told,
What scorn of love inspires her bosom cold,
And in each scene the busy tongues of Fame,
Her constant hate of Hymen's bliss proclaim :—
With bow in hand, and quiver full, she roves,
Another Dian—through the shady groves,
The chase her joy, while all the youth complain—
Græcia's young heroes—that they sigh in vain !

The festival lasted a week ; each day was filled with tourney and joust ; each evening with dance, and song, and mime, with merry music, and sumptuous pyrotechnic displays. The state and its concerns seemed forgotten ;

politics could claim not an hour; and the gay nobility of France, under the leadership of their young and splendid sovereign, wholly surrendered themselves to love and pleasure.

III.

La Vallière's influence over the fickle Louis endured for some years, and during that period she gave birth to four children, two of whom died in their infancy. But it is the fatality of these illegitimate passions, and their chastisement—that they have not in them the enduring elements of a sacred and virtuous love. La Vallière, who was ardently devoted to her royal lover, suffered the keenest unhappiness from the fears that beset her for the duration of his attachment. He continued, however, to distinguish her with his regard. In 1667 he erected the lordship of Vanjour into a duchy in her favour, with reversion to their natural daughter, Mademoiselle de Blois (born A.D. 1665). In the same year, she gave birth to a son, whom the king created Count de

Vermandois, and both were legitimized by letters patent issued in October, 1668. To please Louis she came forth from the retirement which best accorded with her disposition, and shone by his side conspicuous in the splendour of her shame; but she still preserved her natural modesty and sweetness of temper. Her personal charms had always depended much upon expression, and had owed their lustre to the vivacity of youth. Her successive maternities had fatally affected them, and they were still further injured by the intenseness of her mental anxiety. She sought in vain by the elegance of her toilette and the excess of her devotion, to repair or neutralize the ravages of time and disease.

There is a portrait of La Vallière in the Museum at Versailles, which no one can behold without an emotion of sorrowful sympathy. "The Duchess," says M. Capefigue, "stands before a kind of organ, like Saint Cecilia; her appearance is pale and fatigued; she is stout and heavy; her eyes have preserved of their early sweetness only an insignificant and tearful character. She is no longer the young girl,

full of graceful sportiveness, who sparkled in the apartments of Madame; she is now a duchess, ennobled, the mother of four children—how can she promise herself that she will always retain the king's heart? The sight of this portrait will throw you into a melancholy full of reflections. It is easy to understand the tear which the artist has placed in La Vallière's eyes; the prestige of love and youth has passed. Soon there will remain nothing—but disenchantment and repentance!"

There was, indeed, a formidable rival to La Vallière in one who had been, like her, a maid of honour to Madame; Athénais de Tonnay-Charente, better known by her married name as Madame de Montespan. She had not the charms of simplicity, gentleness, and candour that graced La Vallière; but her beauty was more brilliant and her wit more sparkling. So great was her address, that she contrived at one and the same time to preserve her friendship with La Vallière, which threw her constantly into the king's intimacy, and to give the queen an extraordinary opinion of her virtue. Her criminal acquaintance with Louis

begun about the end of the year 1667, and through her powers of fascination and personal attractions, her influence over him daily increased. She had no scruples about supplanting La Vallière; greedy of power, and luxury, and admiration, she saw no better mode of securing them than by completing her conquest of the king. And in accomplishing this object she was seconded by various circumstances. Louis was entering upon the second period of his reign; and the graces which won his youth had no pleasure for his manhood. As he became more absolute, more imperial, more magnificent, so did he require in his mistress a more superb beauty and a more regal presence. The chivalrousness of his youth was gone; and the refinement of love gave place to a splendid voluptuousness.

A loving woman has a quick eye, and La Vallière soon discovered that she had a successful rival in the king's affections. She poured her reproaches into his weary ear; he replied, that he did not wish to be wearied, and did not love to be contradicted. She surrendered herself to tears and resignation. She might have

remained and suffered in silence but for the bitter raillery of Madame de Montespan, which like the lightning scathed while it glittered. Unable to endure the miseries of her position—the coldness of the king, the triumph of her rival—she resolved to embrace a life of religious austerity. Unknown to the king she fled from the court, and took refuge in the Carmelite convent of St. Marie of Chaillot.

Louis as yet, however, had not completely forgotten his first passion. Her absence awoke a pang which he mistook for the keen regret of love. Lauzun, the captain of his guard, was despatched to bring her from the convent by force; and the minister Colbert, the guardian of her children, to try the effect of persuasion. Unwillingly she obeyed the king's command. On her return, she was received by Louis with distinction, by Madame de Montespan with an outburst of affectionate emotion; and for two years France beheld, without any apparent disgust, the strange spectacle of two mistresses in one palace—two suns in one heaven, and the king dividing his attentions pretty equally between them. But by degrees, the fading beauty, the

tearful penitence, and silent reproaches of La Vallière had their effect on the king's mind. Those mute reproaches are so bitterly eloquent, are so difficult to confute or ward off! A tearful glance has more power than the most passionate declamation. The discarded mistress tasted of the sorrow, and jealousy, and unavailing indignation that she herself had inflicted upon Maria Theresa—upon her who had so little deserved it—and, on one occasion, when Louis was openly displaying his love for the beautiful Montespan, she exclaimed to one of her friends, “If anything troubles me at the Carmelites, I will call to mind what these people have made me suffer.”

She again returned to her desire to expiate the sins and follies of her career in a religious house, and solicited from the king permission to retire. Still he showed himself unwilling to lose the mistress he no longer loved. Sick with anxiety and remorse, she fell seriously ill, and so severe was her malady, that it was thought necessary to administer to her the Holy Sacraments. In the struggle between life and death, life conquered; she recovered,

and was more than ever resolved to consecrate herself to God's service. The epoch was marked by the publication of a work which, though generally attributed to her, and certainly recording her personal sentiments, was probably drawn up by some *littérateur* of the court. It is entitled, "*Réflexions sur la miséricorde de Dieu par une dame pénitente,*" and breathes a spirit of touching humility and sincere repentance.

She now made known her resolution to her confessor, the Marquis de Bellefonds, who had formerly served with distinction in the wars of France, but had abandoned the pursuit of arms for religious works. He encouraged her with hopes of future peace, and she needed the encouragement, for the woman's heart sometimes faltered at the magnitude of the sacrifice it contemplated. We may penetrate the secret of her struggles in her letters to this austere adviser. Thus, she writes to him from Versailles, on the 8th of February (1674): "I am in despair at seeing myself so little advanced, and you cannot make me feel more ashamed than I feel already. Nevertheless, I

am firmer than ever, and if I could enjoy all the greatness in the world, I would not exchange it against the single wish to be a Carmelite. I am held to the world but by a thread; help me to break it. I have some sensibility, and it is right I should tell you that Mademoiselle de Blois (her daughter) has much inspired me with it. I confess to you that I felt much pleasure in seeing her look as pretty as ever; but at the same time I had a scruple about it. If I saw her with pleasure, I shall quit her without pain. Believe as much of this as you will, but I feel what I tell you. All my grief is that I must speak to the king. To quit the court for the cloister will cost me nothing; but to speak to the king, oh, there is my punishment! I expose myself to you just what I am. Do not love me the less for it, I pray you, and let pity incline you towards me, as esteem inclines me towards you."

At length, she found herself strong enough to speak to the king, and this time she met with no opposition to her wish. Louis himself had always some inclination towards a life of devotion, and, perhaps, he was not unwilling

that the world should see how absorbing had been La Vallière's love; how that no second attachment could occupy her heart, but that from him she turned to Heaven. It was the most exquisite homage the Olympian Jove could receive. He desired her, however, to choose some religious order in which the woman he had loved might be distinguished by the dignity of abbess, but La Vallière's repentance and remorse were too sincere for this. She by no means wished to blazon forth her past sin or her recent devotion, and replied, that she who had been unable to conduct herself through life, was unfitted to guide others. There were those who, when her determination became known, advised her simply to retire into a religious house without taking the veil. Others counselled her to quit the Court with her mother, and have her children brought up under her own eye. But she felt the weakness of her heart, and determined to bind herself to Heaven by an irrevocable vow. She chose one of the austere orders, that of the Carmelites; and having made known to the Court her final resolution, she received the public adieux of

those who had courted her in prosperity, of some nobler minds who had shunned her while triumphant and now honoured her when penitent, at the house of Madame de Montespan.

Her most painful act, though the one which best proved the sincerity of her remorse, was her farewell of the Queen. She had always, even in the sunniest moments of the king's favour, done all that her peculiar position enabled her to do, to spare Maria Theresa's feelings; and her royal mistress had not been unaware of the long and bitter struggle in La Vallière's heart between her love and her remorse. At this last and significant interview—an interview so remarkable that we wonder it has escaped the artist and the poet—the Queen received her with marked tenderness; but La Vallière flung herself at her feet, and, weeping bitterly, implored her to pardon all the pain she had caused her. She then retired into the convent of the Carmelites of the Rue St. Jacques, and on the 4th of June, 1675, when she was yet but thirty-one years of age, took the veil in the presence of the whole Court.

The penitence and retirement of a king's mistress might seem, to the superficial observer, a very ordinary event, and one which, in an historical point of view, could have no value. But he who comes to such a conclusion will grievously err. Its political consequences were serious and important. La Vallière had been the friend and confidante of the ablest minister France ever produced—the far-seeing and virtuous Colbert; Madame de Montespan was the partisan of his rival, Louvois. With the rise of the new mistress the influence of Louvois increased, and the authority of Colbert diminished. The simple and modest character of La Vallière had had its effect upon the manners and morals of the Court. But now began an era of luxury and vice; of “pomp, splendour, rich dresses, and deep play.” La Vallière had never attempted to direct the councils of the sovereign. She had loved Louis the *man*, not Louis the *king*. But her successor hungered after power and wealth; her ambitious spirit aspired for something more than a share of the royal favour; and she attained, and for many years preserved, an ascendancy over him in state

affairs which was productive of disastrous results.

For no less a period than thirty-five years the repentant La Vallière enjoyed the calm seclusion of the convent of the Rue St. Jacques. Twice in that period she came into contact with the outer world ; first, on the occasion of the marriage of her daughter, Mademoiselle de Blois, to the Prince Conti, when all the Court repaired to the convent to pour their congratulations upon Sister Louise de la Miséricorde. Second, when her tranquillity was shaken by the intelligence of the death of her son, the Count de Vermandois. She wept for him bitterly, and bitterly, too, exclaimed :—

“Alas ! I had more reason to weep for his birth !”

For the rest, she gave evident proofs of the sincerity of her repentance, and never expressed the slightest regret for the splendours she had voluntarily relinquished. What struggle her heart may have sustained, between the promptings of natural affection and the inspiration of keen remorse—how painful may have been the effort to repress all human feelings, save those

which fed her overmastering repentance—who shall tell? No eye but the Eternal can penetrate the solitude of the cell, and behold the conflict between the heart and the soul! Apparently, she enjoyed a very real and permanent peace. Madame de Sévigné says that she preserved her beauty surprisingly, and we may thence infer that her mental struggles were not very severe. When Madame de Montespan was in her turn supplanted by Madame de Maintenon, she paid a visit to sister Louise—a singular interview, which to the bystanders must have suggested some wholesome reflections. But, certainly, the guilt of the young girl who fell a victim to the grace and fascination of a youthful king, was nothing in comparison with that of the splendid beauty who exerted all her seductions to compass her own shame, and gloried in the double adultery committed by Louis and herself. But there, in the Carmelite convent, all was ended—passion, and sorrow, and pride, and ambition, all had terminated in the dreary solitude of a life devoted to repentance for the past! La Vallière, however, was happy and resigned—nay,

rejoicing with mystical enthusiasm in the full belief of her eternal salvation; her rival sighed for the guilty pomp she could no longer enjoy, and would fain have returned to the world which was willing to receive her no longer.

Voltaire has a striking allusion to La Vallière's repentance. He says that "to clothe herself with sackcloth, to fast rigorously, to chant at night to the chorus of an unknown tongue, to walk barefooted—all this could not disgust the delicacy of a woman accustomed to days of luxury and pleasure. A king," he adds, "who would punish thus a guilty woman would be a tyrant; and yet it is thus that so many women punish themselves for having loved. The Superior of the Carmelites has recorded, 'I saw her in the last years of her life, and I heard her, with a tone of voice that went to my very heart, say the most beautiful things concerning her condition.'"

She died at length, of a lingering and painful malady, in 1710, aged sixty-six, "in the sure and certain hope"—as far as man can judge—"of a blessed resurrection." Her remarkable

history, which has in it so much of the pathos and contrasts of romance, furnishes a moral that the most careless reader cannot fail to appreciate. The young maid of honour; the passionately loving girl; the woman struggling between her affections and her sense of right; the king's mistress, surrounded by the pomp and splendour of a court; the fading and forsaken beauty; the sorrowing penitent; the calm and happy nun; these are changes so striking and suggestive, that they will suggest to every mind some salutary reflections. The superb young king, the admirable and adorable Paris, had presented her, in the flush of her loveliness, with the golden apple. Alas! like the fabled fruit that was said to grow on the shores of the Dead Sea, the blooming outside was a bitter delusion—within was nothing but dust and ashes!

Authorities.—Souvenirs, par Madame de Caylus; Mémoires du Duc de Saint Simon; Mémoires du Duc de La Rochefoucauld; Voltaire, Siècle de Louis Quatorze; James' Life of Louis XIV; Bulwer Lytton's

**Preface to his play of “Mademoiselle de La Vallière ;”
Mémoires de Louis XIV, par l’Abbé Choisi ; Made-
moiselle de La Vallière, par M. Capetigue ; Œuvres de
Bussy-Rabutin ; Discours sur les Amours du Roi et de
Mademoiselle de La Vallière, &c.**

MADAME DE STAËL.

A.D. 1766—1817.

MADAME DE STAËL.

“*Après tout*, no one can deny that Madame de Staël was a woman of great capacity and surpassing esprit : *she will last*.”—NAPOLEON BONAPARTE.

I.

AT those epochs when the old habits and traditions of a nation are breaking up, and society is undergoing a rapid and violent transition ; when forces long confined burst the thin crust of conservatism that has kept them down, and in the explosion shatter the erections of a byegone age, the creeds and economies sanctified by time—but by time only ; at those

epochs when the ancient boundaries are violated, and the sacred landmarks destroyed, and class meets class in fatal hostility, and the mouldering hate of centuries finds a terrible development; at those epochs literature partakes of the general ferment, flings aside its decencies, gives utterance to the soul of passion, and stirs and inflames instead of guiding and consoling. It no longer sits apart in calm seclusion, and like Zeus, from a throne above the earth directs the ways, and regulates the minds of men; but descends, like the Homeric Mars, into the press of the battle, shouts the war-cry heartily, and exchanges the office of the teacher for the duties of the warrior. Its Olympian serenity is gone; the voice and the thought are those of a glowing brain and a passionate heart. The eloquence becomes less measured, but more impetuous; sentiment gives place to emotion; admiration of the past, calm analysis of the present, to troubled anticipations, mixed hopes and fears of the future. "Hush'd is Apollo's lute," and a wilder, fiercer music rings in the ears, and finds an echo in the souls of men.

Such an epoch was the French Revolution ; not that outbreak of the respectabilities which took place in 1830, but the sad, terrible struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed that cost France so much blood in the disastrous reign of Louis XVI. It was the protest of the indignant, suffering many against the cruel, voluptuous, and arbitrary few ; it was the protest of down-trodden genius against the mediocrity that went clothed in purple, and attributed all things unto itself. A protest so violent that it overthrew the social foundations, the asylums of law and the temples of religion ; and communicated so much of its own fiery tumultuous character to the thoughts and feelings of men, that, as society grew reckless of the restraints and decencies of custom, so literature threw off its moderation and sprang into the arena to combat like an athlete.

There had been many signs of the coming change. Men of talent, women of talent, assembled together in coteries, and talked—they knew not what, but that they were sensible of an irrepressible anxiety, a ceaseless restlessness ; a dissatisfaction with all that was, a long-

ing for, and yet an apprehension of, what was to come. So the shepherd on the hill-top looks out upon the lurid East in fierce desire, and yet in secret dread, of the coming day. It may bring with it the wind and the storm, but anything, oh, anything is better than the long, dull, dreamy night !

Very different the tone of the glittering salons where reigned supreme the social queens, Madame de Lambert, Madame de Tencin, Madame du Deffand, and Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse,* to that of the decorous assemblies which had gathered at the Hôtel Rambouillet in the old conservative days. Here prevailed a sharper and more incisive wit ; a freer tone of sentiment ; a more sceptical philosophy ; a more daring and searching analysis. Men had got past the sonorous cadencies of Racine ; women had flung aside the dull platitudes of Mademoiselle de Scudery. The wits of the Encyclopedia had learned to doubt ; the creators of romances had ventured to deal with the criminal passions of the human heart. It was

* *Bureaux d'Esprit* was the name given to these famous meetings.

the unrest of the ocean before the tempest. The sky still shone overhead ; but the heavy clouds came swooping up from the distance, and the deep low murmur gathered that is always prophetic of a storm, and the sougling of the wind penetrated into the recesses of the valleys. Men looked at each other in dread and anxiety. What did it all portend ? The earth shook beneath their feet, but still the courtiers made merry in the palace, and the noble in his château, and the priest in the desecrated confessional. Watchman, what of the night ? The music of the revel almost drowned his voice, but there were thoughtful men and women who trembled at the reply, for it told of a night nearly past, and of a blood-red dawn, breaking over the distant hills.

Of this fierce, passionate, enquiring literature—the natural growth of a fierce, passionate, enquiring age—Madame de Staël was one of the most powerful exponents and ablest representatives. Both in her character and her works she typified her epoch ; a bold, audacious, sparkling intellect, impatient of conventionalities, fearless of consequences, liberal in sympathies,

opposed hand and foot to an arbitrary authority in morals, manners or politics, hungering and thirsting after an almost impossible love. In Madame de Staël, the heart was as wild and stormy as the brain, and too often prompted her to a disregard of principle. She could not walk in the beaten path; and genius, endeavouring to strike out new routes, is apt to lose itself in bewildering morasses and perilous wildernesses.

She was the daughter of remarkable parents, of Monsieur and Madame Necker—the former, a man of political celebrity, the latter, a woman of great social fame. Madame Necker was born Mademoiselle Suzanne Curchod, and the daughter of a Protestant pastor of the Pays de Vaud. She was a woman of spotless virtue, of unusual acquirements, and respectable capacity. Necker, born at Geneva in 1734, was the son of a professor of civil law; received a good education; was sent to Paris at the age of fifteen, and entered life as a clerk in the banking house of Monsieur Vernet. He had a financial ability unusual at that period, entered the famous house of the Thellusons,

became a cashier, afterwards a partner, speculated prudently and successfully, grew wealthy, and was appointed by the Genevese their ambassador at Paris. On the death of Thelluson, he established a bank of his own, and being a man of eminent respectability, who never plunged into any hazardous adventures, he amassed a large fortune. The Court borrowed his money, and the Ministry took his advice. His influence rapidly increased. In 1776, he was appointed Director, and in 1778, Comptroller-General of the Financial Department—a promotion to which no Protestant had previously attained.

Thirteen years previously, he had married Mademoiselle Curchod, and, twelve years previously, she had given birth to a daughter, Anne Marie Louise Germaine Necker, born in Paris on the 22nd of April, 1766.

Germaine Necker, at a very early age displayed unusual mental powers, and, for a French child, received an unusual education. Her parents being Protestant, she was brought up at home, under their eye, and her mother being a woman of great acquirements, her taste

was carefully cultivated and her love of study wisely directed. But the strict Huguenot mother took little heed of the emotions and feelings throbbing in the young girl's bosom, and sought to bring her up on that Procrustean system which is so popular with the respectably virtuous. She was shut out from all pastimes. Her mind was fed on the solidest and most wholesome diet. But the hidden fire sparkled forth occasionally, and it was her favourite (though forbidden) amusement to cut out kings and queens in paper, and make them perform in impromptu tragedies. Hence arose her habit in after years of playing with a rolled up strip of paper or a piece of twig—the magician's wand, without which her eloquence grew tame, and her spells ceased to summon spirits.

The young girl sat by her mother's side in the evening *réunions* which the renown of the Neckers rendered so attractive, and her naturally quiet and irregular intellect was necessarily stimulated to precocious growth in such an atmosphere of wit and talent. Her magnificent eyes—dark but luminous, and generally glowing with a lustre that lighted up

the otherwise swarthy and unhandsome countenance—were fixed in the intensest eagerness upon the savants and poets who played their parts in those celebrated assemblies. She appeared to understand every phase of the sparkling conversation, whether it dallied in the flowery lands of romance and poetry, or lingered in the more arid regions of politics and science. Marmontel and Grimm, Thomas and the Abbé Raynal, were surprised at the pertinency of her questions and the force of her answers. They delighted to converse with her, to attack, involve, and perplex her. They directed her to new sources of information, and guided her into regular channels of thought. Happy was it for Germaine that Heaven had gifted her with a robust and vigorous intellect, or we tremble to think of the sickly plant that so many geniuses might have coddled into inanity!

With such an education, Germaine could not fail to become an author, and she made her *début* with a series of pen and ink portraits of the celebrities she met with, and a panegyric on a book which few girls of her age ever heard

of—the *Esprit des Loix* of Montesquieu. She was then asked by the Abbé Raynal to contribute a chapter on the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes to his elaborate history, but her modesty induced her to decline. When Necker, in 1781, published his *Compte Rendu*, or view of the financial condition of France, she criticized it in an anonymous letter to her father, but the style revealed its authorship.

“Yet this precocious taste for literature,” says Miss Kavanagh, “received no encouragement from Monsieur Necker. He liked women to be accomplished and intellectual, but he did not like them to write. At his request, his wife gave up composition, and only indulged herself in fragmentary writing; Monsieur Necker could not endure to think that his presence should ever be considered an interruption to his wife’s literary labours. His daughter, aware of his feelings, and loving and respecting him too deeply to disregard them, took the habit of writing any where, or any how, standing, and with no better desk than such as the corner of the marble mantelpiece afforded. Thus Monsieur Necker never witnessed the effort;

he saw the result, and, spite all his prejudices against female authorship, that result was too splendid not to conquer his opposition.

“Madame Necker, however, was disappointed in her daughter’s education. Close study proved so injurious to Mademoiselle Necker, that it had to be interrupted when she was fourteen. She was sent to her father’s country house at Saint Ouen, to recruit her failing health. In this pleasant retreat she enjoyed herself greatly with Mademoiselle Huber, her friend; the two girls assumed the attire of nymphs and muses, and acted, or rather improvised, plays, dramas and tragedies in the open air. From the calm and severe world of learning, Germaine had escaped into the enchanted realms of imagination; and, to Madame Necker’s mortification, the fugitive never fairly returned. All her daughter’s brilliant gifts and genius could not console her mother for the deficiencies which this interrupted discipline had caused; and to a lady who expressed her admiration of Mademoiselle Necker’s wit, eloquence, and intellectual power—she coldly

and sincerely replied ; ‘ all that is nothing—nothing at all—to what I wished to accomplish.’ ”

It was, however, probably owing to this forced inaction that Madame de Staël’s intellectual powers survived the violent stress to which they had been subjected. These prodigies of eleven years old seldom ripen into any fruitful maturity ; but the rest and recreation of Saint Ouen preserved the youthful Germaine from a premature decay.

It must be admitted that her ideas were sufficiently precocious. Gibbon, the historian, who, in earlier years, had been Suzanne Curchod’s lover, often attended Madame Necker’s soirées, and his rich and eloquent conversation made him a welcome and an honoured guest. The observant Germaine perceived that his absence was a source of regret, and that his departure from Paris was attended with evident sorrow. To secure the constant companionship of a friend so valued, she matured at length a notable idea, and going to her mother, calmly proposed that she should marry Monsieur Gibbon in order that he might never

again be taken from them! At this time, Germaine was not more than ten years old.

Mademoiselle Necker, as she approached womanhood, developed into a remarkable creature, and her mental gifts and conversational powers won for her an extended reputation. Such a woman was not likely to be long without lovers, even if her splendid dowry (£80,000) had not attracted them. Amongst them was the celebrated Monsieur de Guibert, whose gifts and graces had broken the heart of Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse. He fell violently in love with the swarthy, large-eyed, talented and impassioned girl, and portrayed her in a fanciful portrait under the name of Zulmé.

"Zulmé," he wrote, "is only twenty, and she is the most celebrated priestess of Apollo. See, from amidst the sacred maidens, one steps forth. Never will my heart forget the scene. Her large black eyes glowed with genius; her hair, the colour of ebony, rolled on her shoulders in profuse curls; her features were more expressive than beautiful; they spoke of something higher than the usual destiny of her

sex. . . I hear her, I gaze upon her with transport. I detect in her features charms more beautiful than beauty. How varied and expressive is the play of her countenance! What modulations there are in the tones of her voice! How perfectly do thought and expression agree! She talks, and, even if her words did not reach me, her tones, her gestures, her looks would have enabled me to understand her. She pauses a moment, and her last words echo in my heart, and I can read in her eyes the thoughts she has not yet uttered."

Her fascination, indeed, was marvellous, but it was not the fascination of beauty. Except her deep dark eyes—orbs of unspeakable eloquence and expression—her features possessed nothing attractive or pleasing. It was not her conversation, for in this rare gift others have equalled, or even excelled her. Her genius must necessarily have exercised a potent ascendancy, but genius does not always charm while it subdues, does not always captivate while it conquers. No; the true secret of the fascination which spell bound almost every one who approached her was, her earnestness.

There is something infectious in enthusiasm, and her's was the enthusiasm of a warm heart and large intellect. While she spoke her eyes glowed, her whole face lighted up; she seemed like the prophetess of Delphi, filled with the might of sublimity of inspiration. She was always struggling to utter the wisdom and warning of the God. This young girl, it was evident, looked upon life as something grand and serious; was conscious of its noble aspects; and felt its divine sympathies. The social world was heaving and shaking around her, and her spirit throbbed in unison with each new emotion. She could believe in love, and fame, and power. She dreamed wild dreams of a regenerated earth. Now, you cannot be ten minutes in company with an earnest man without catching something of his earnestness. What then must be the effect of the enthusiasm of genius? How irresistible must be its power to seize you, and bear you onward with its own glorious tide of thought and feeling, until you fancy that this new emotion and pleasurable excitement proceed from yourself, and are fascinated by the genius which has raised you

up to its own stature. So the Eolian harp is mute until the wind sweeps the strings, and wakes them into music. Half of our satisfaction with genius springs from the subtle manners in which it interpenetrates our own being, stirs our imagination, and awakens our intellect; and so, Madame de Staël's admirers admired her all the more because they caught for the time the afflatus of her grand enthusiasm, and were filled with something of her own exaltation of thought and purity of feeling.

Such a woman ought to have married, perhaps, a poet; or, at all events, a man who could have always responded to the heights and depths of her passionate nature. For the enthusiasm of her affections defied the restraints of judgment. She loved her father so deeply that she was jealous of her mother! In her memoir of that eminently respectable politician, she speaks of his marriage, as a heroine of George Sand's might speak: "sometimes talking with me in his retirement," says the *femme incomprise*, "he went over that time of his life whose recollections affected me deeply—a

time when I imagined him so young, so amiable, so solitary ; a time when our destinies might have been united for ever, if fate had made us contemporaries !” We cannot imagine an Englishwoman writing of her father as of a lover, and we confess there seems to us an irreverence in the thought ; but it sprang from the recesses of her earnest and impulsive soul, and was the expression of her capacity to love as she could never hope to *be* loved.

Her parents did not wholly understand their daughter. They could appreciate the resources of her intellect, but knew nothing of her heart ; and contentedly proceeded to choose a husband for her who should be a Protestant, of good family, of tolerable fortune, and unblemished character. Whether he could be anything more, and whether being anything more he would be a better mate for the imaginative and passionate Germaine, neither Necker the financier nor Madame Necker, the pious Genevese, thought it necessary to consider. They found all they desired in Eric Magnus, Baron de Staël-Holstein, secretary to the Swedish ambassador at the French Court ; he was several years older

than Germaine, but he was noble and a Protestant, and a favourite with his sovereign, Gustavus III., who promised him the French embassy at the first vacancy, if he married the wealthy Necker's heiress-daughter. Germaine made no objection. She only insisted upon his remaining in Paris. If he allowed her to live near her beloved father, and the *réunions* of which she was already the charm and pride, she was very well content to marry the Baron. But her heart was not satisfied, and it has ever appeared to us that her writings are all touched with the colour of this dreary longing for something unattained. Love throbs in every line of *Delphine* and *Corinne*; a restless impatient passion—a wild and stormy music; not the love of a tranquil mind, but the unrest of an unsatisfied heart. “Love,” she says, “is the angel with the flaming sword, placed by God at the gates of Paradise.” Alas, she had never entered that paradise, and she waited sorrowfully at the gates until the flaming sword should bid them open. But the angel had no pity for that despairing yet powerful genius; and to the last she remained ignor-

ant of the mystery which seemed to her so
brimful with pleasure.

II.

The satisfaction she could not find in love Madame de Staël now proposed to seek in ambition, and resolved to enter into the lists of literature.

She had already made some tentative efforts ; had written a comedy in verse, two mediocre tragedies, and some prose tales ; but these had been confined to her own private circle. She first threw down her gage to the public after her marriage, in the "Letters on the Life and Works of Jean Jacques Rousseau," a book of fire and vigour, remarkable enough as the production of a young woman, twenty years of age. It made a sensation in society, which helped to balance against her offences in etiquette ; her talking of love before Frenchwomen ; her irregular dress ; her bad curtsy when presented to the Queen. But she was prevented for a time

from following up the success by the occurrence of notable and tragical events.

We have alluded to Monsieur Necker's acceptance of the office of Comptroller-General of the Finances in 1776. He held the post until 1781, giving abundant evidence of his honesty and patriotism, but was then displaced, owing to Court intrigues. He had, however, already published his *Compte Rendu*—a clear and searching survey of the country's financial position. Its statements and conclusions were disputed by Monsieur de Calonne, who had succeeded him in the ministry. Necker prepared a reply, which he submitted to Louis; and the king, perceiving its accuracy and trenchant power, requested him not to publish it. But Necker was unwilling that his character should suffer in the eyes of the nation, and boldly sent it to press. It was published, and sold immensely. Louis XVI., enraged at this contumacy, banished him to a distance of forty leagues from Paris. He left the capital, attended by a numerous body of admiring and grateful citizens, and retired to Saint Ouen, where he amused himself in conversation and study, and

in the preparation of a work entitled "*De l'Importance des Opinions Religieuses.*"

An interval of anarchy and disorder followed, and in 1788, the need of a popular and powerful minister being apparent, the king summoned his astute financier from his retreat. Necker obeyed, though with reluctance. The funds immediately rose thirty per cent, and the statesman on his entrance into Paris was received with a tremendous ovation. But he was not the man for the crisis. In calmer seas and milder weather he would have guided the ship of the state with ability; but he was incapable of facing calmly and successfully the storm that now gathered up its horrent wings, and brooded over the land. Nor was he supported by the sovereign whom he had hoped to serve. Louis grew wroth at the concessions that were made to the people, and resolute upon one more effort to secure despotic power, assembled a large military force in and around Paris, and, in July 1789, took the decisive step of banishing Necker. The minister was ordered to quit Paris immediately, and in secret. The royal mandate reached him when at dinner. After

the meal was ended, he and his wife got into their carriage, as if for their usual afternoon drive, passed through the streets of Paris unnoticed, and went on their way to Brussels, where, two days afterwards, they were joined by Baron and Madame de Staël. Hence they proceeded to Bâle, to receive a summons from the monarch recalling Necker to power. The Bastille had fallen, and the Revolution begun. The Parliament had annulled Necker's exile, and the voices of the crowd demanded that the one minister they knew to be honest should again be intrusted with the direction of affairs. Necker returned to Paris, though he knew the perilous nature of the task imposed upon him. "Never did triumph more splendid await a popular minister. From Bâle to Paris he met with one long ovation. Women knelt on the road as he passed, men unyoked his horses, and drew his carriage. With him seemed to return that liberty whose reign was to be so tragic. On reaching Paris, Necker at once proceeded to the Hôtel de Ville, to ask for an amnesty of the conquered party; an impassioned and enthusiastic crowd heard him

with transport. When he stood on the balcony and spoke—the hero of that crowd’s worship—Madame de Staël, overpowered by her feelings, fainted with joy. ‘When I returned to consciousness,’ she wrote, many years later. ‘I felt I had reached the limits of all possible happiness.’”

The forces let loose by the demon of revolution were not to be subdued by the virtuous mediocrity of Necker; and there arose a man more capable than he of succeeding (had he lived) in the hazardous enterprise; a man whose stormy eloquence “wielded at will the fierce democracy,” and before whose splendid genius the Genevese statesman’s honest, but meaner mind, stood rebuked. Mirabeau rose, and Necker sunk. His popularity passed away from him like a dream. In September, 1790, he resigned his office, but was not suffered to leave the kingdom. Charged with treason to the cause of the people, he was arrested at Arcis-sur-Aube; at Vesoul he was threatened with death; and it required an order from the Constituent Assembly to procure his release. He retired to Coppet, in Switzerland, where he

was soon afterwards followed by his daughter, who had given birth to a son on the previous 31st of August. She was necessary to his consolation, for he deplored the errors he had committed, and regretted the power which he had lost; and never was her genius more fittingly employed than when it checked the self-reproach induced by an overweening conscientiousness, and soothed the mortification of a mind ambitious of fame, but without the power to win and preserve it. Though all the world now saw how small was the idol that had been once lifted on the lofty pedestal of a nation's homage, yet to Madame de Staël and her mother he still remained—the Hero. Nor could they understand how the country could be so blind to his greatness; the greatness which appeared to them a thing so tangible and conspicuous. Such is the magic, and such the beauty of household love; which, like the moonlight, fills with a glorious lustre the dark, drear places of the heart, and brightens with its radiance every deformity of intellect and weakness of character.

After a residence of some duration at Coppet,

Madame de Staël returned to Paris, unable to remain withdrawn from the progress of that revolution which affected most powerfully her sympathies, and most keenly aroused her imagination. She soon drew around her a circle of men and women of talent and influence, and gradually acquired no small amount of political power. Both as the daughter of Necker—as the wife of a Swedish ambassador—as a woman of rare mental endowments—she occupied a conspicuous position, and her advice was listened to with respect, her sympathy accepted with pride. Through her influence, Monsieur de Narbonne, a handsome, chivalrous, and accomplished royalist, was made Minister of War. He held the office a few months; was dismissed, and found in Madame de Staël's house a secure asylum. The censorious world hinted that in her anxiety for his safety, she was actuated by a love which her husband could not sanction. The world talked loudly, and echoes of the scandal have floated down to our own days, but the world brought no very definite proof, and posterity need not, if it would, supply the omission of Madame de Staël's contemporaries.

A commissaire of police attempted to search her hotel for the proscribed aristocrat. In this moment of peril she summoned all her energies to her aid, and overwhelmed the unfortunate commissaire with a flood of sparkling eloquence. By terms impassioned, witty, dignified, and severe, she shook the official's resolution; and finally conquered him by a vivid demonstration of the evil consequences sure to result from the insult that would be offered to Sweden in searching the house of her ambassador. And Sweden, you know! On the frontiers of France! an invasion might immediately follow. The commissaire's geography was at fault, and alarmed at the dangers he might bring down upon his country, he took his leave. Dr. Bollmann, a generous Hanoverian physician, then undertook to complete the good work begun by Madame de Staël. He gave the ex-minister a friend's passport, and despising the risk he ran in aiding an aristocrat to escape, took him in his charge, and in four days deposited him safely in London.

Madame de Staël had passports for herself and household, but disdained to make use of them while her influence could yet rescue a

friend from danger. On the 31st of August, she was apprised that M. de Jancourt, and M. de Lally-Tollendal, both devoted royalists, had been arrested, and committed to the prison of the Abbaye—from whence men issued only to the Place de la Grève and the guillotine. Lally was saved by his abilities. He undertook the defence of a fellow-prisoner, and actually procured his acquittal. The incident attracted the attention of many powerful persons, and Lord Sutherland, the English ambassador, also exercising his influence, Lally was rescued.

But how was Monsieur de Jancourt to be preserved? “Madame de Staël,” says her English biographer,* “procured a list of the members of the Commune of Paris, the real governors of the city. She knew them only by their terrible regulation, and chance would have decided her choice, had she not suddenly recognized the name of Manuel as that of a man who made some pretence to literature. He had brought out a little volume of Mirabeau’s letters, to which he had written a preface,

* Miss Maria Norris.

‘bad enough, but showing an ambition to be accounted witty.’

“Reasoning from these premises, she came to the conclusion that a man who loved applause would not be indifferent to solicitation, and she wrote to Manuel to ask him for an audience.”

The favour was granted, and the interview appointed for the next morning at seven o'clock. Madame de Staël was punctual to a moment, but had to wait an hour before the member of the commune could be seen. She employed the interval in examining every accessory of the chamber, in the hope she might obtain some little clue to his character. “His portrait being just above his bureau, his vanity then might be touched. At last he came; and Madame de Staël gives him credit for the fact that she changed his mind by good principles alone. She represented to him the vicissitudes of popularity (what woman could do this so well as Necker’s daughter?) of which vicissitudes every day afforded some fresh example. ‘In six months,’ so spoke this true heroine, ‘in six months you yourself may have no more

power ; save my friends, and reserve for yourself one sweet remembrance for the period when you, in your turn, may be proscribed.' ”

The eloquence of Madame de Staël and the natural compassionateness of the revolutionary official produced the desired result, and on the 1st of September M. de Jancourt was liberated. Twenty-four hours later, and nothing could have saved him ; for twenty-four hours later began that terrible day, the day of massacres—the Second of September.

It was the very day on which Madame de Staël had arranged to leave Paris. Outside the city she was to take up in her carriage another fugitive, the Abbé de Montesquiou, to whom she had given a servant's passport, and who was to travel in a servant's disguise.

The second of September broke, and her friends alarmed at the red horror which had taken possession of the fatal city, urged her to remain contented with the shelter of the embassy, and to defer her journey from Paris. But she feared to compromise the safety of the Abbé, and trusting the carriage of a foreign envoy would be allowed to pass unimpeded, set out on her dangerous journey.

She had scarcely accomplished four paces from the Hôtel de Suède, when the noise of the postillion's whips attracted a crowd of ferocious old women, who detained her horses by force, and loudly protesting that she was carrying off the gold of France to enrich its enemies, soon drew to their aid men as furious as themselves. Her servants were compelled to drive to the section of the quarter in which she resided. On reaching the Quartier St. Germain she descended from her carriage, whispered to her servants a hurried message to the Abbé de Montesquiou. She then entered the assembly with an air of dignified calmness. The president informed her that she had been denounced as aiding the escape of proscribed persons. He proceeded to examine her passport, and detecting a slight informality, ordered her to repair to the Hôtel de Ville under the escort of some gendarmes. For this purpose she had to traverse a third of Paris, in a carriage and six, and attended by servants in livery, through crowded streets which resounded with cries of "à bas les aristocrats!" The journey occupied three hours. The car-

riage was beset by infuriated crowds who seemed to thirst for blood, and who assailed her (ignorant, however, of her identity) with the most sanguinary threats. If she appealed to the gendarmes for protection, they repulsed her with gestures of menace and disdain. She was pregnant, but that condition which most calls for the sympathy of man, did not disarm them. On the contrary, they felt the more angry against her, because they knew themselves to be the more cruel. At length, the gendarme who rode in the carriage with her, was so moved by her tears and situation that he promised to protect her at the peril of his life.

She reached the Hôtel de Ville, and through a throng of cruel faces, and beneath a menacing arch of pikes and swords, she began to ascend the staircase. One man aimed his lance towards her; the faithful gendarme warded off the blow with his sabre. "Had I fallen at that moment," she said afterwards, "I must assuredly have perished, for it is in the nature of the mob to respect whoever stands erect, but for a fallen foe they have no pity."

Great was her relief when she entered the chamber where Robespierre and his companions were seated. She immediately asserted her right to be set free as the Ambassadors of Sweden, and appealed to her passports in proof of what she affirmed. At this moment Manuel entered, and his admiration having been secured by her generous eloquence on behalf of Jancourt, he now came forward voluntarily to her assistance.* While the Commune decided on her sentence, he took her and her waiting woman into his own cabinet, where they waited six hours, faint with hunger, thirst, and fear. The window looked out upon the bloody Place de la Grève, and revealed the terrible spectacle of the murderers coming back from the prisons, red with the blood of their victims, and filling the abhorrent air with their cruel exultation!

In the evening, through Manuel's intercession, the Ambassadors was released. He con-

* Manuel was a man of generous sympathies, and afterwards lost his life on the scaffold for making a speech in favour of Louis XVI. He refused to vote for his death.

ducted her home in her carriage, and procured her a new passport, but warned her that she would only be allowed to travel with her maid, and accompanied by a gendarme as far as the frontiers. That gendarme was Tallien, who afterwards rose to a sudden and splendid celebrity. On the journey, he attended her with every mark of respect, and she was soon restored to the embraces of her parents in the sweet seclusion of Coppet.

III.

In January 1796, Madame de Staël visited England, whether from a desire to examine personally a country whose constitution and government were warmly admired by her father and herself, or from a natural wish to remove the impressions of the terrible events she had witnessed, by exposing her mind to new influences of scenery and association, is uncertain.

After a hurried visit to the metropolis, she

established herself at a house called Juniper Hall, in the picturesque village of Mickleham, and in the heart of the fairest scenery of Surrey. Here a complete "colony of French *émigrés*" was soon assembled, comprising Monsieur de Narbonne and Monsieur de Talleyrand ; Madame de la Châtre ; Madame de Beaumont ; the Duke de Guignes, and Monsieur d'Arblay. They were not very wealthy. Most of them had been deprived of their estates by the revolutionists ; but they shared the little they had in common ; they were very lively and merry, and enjoyed exceedingly their explorations of the romantic scenery that surrounded them. In the neighbourhood was Norbury Park, the seat of Mr. Phillips, whose wife was a daughter of Doctor Burney, the musician, and sister of Fanny Burney, the authoress of "*Evelina*" and "*Camilla*," but better known to posterity through her entertaining Diary. Mrs. Phillips showed the *émigrés* those little attentions which are always so dear to the exiled, and there soon existed a cordial understanding between the inhabitants of Norbury Park and the colony of Juniper Hall. Miss Burney became a welcome

visitor to the latter, and has preserved in her Diary some charming sketches of Madame de Staël and her companions.

“Madame de Staël,” she writes (February 29th, 1793), “is now at the head of the little French colony in this neighbourhood. Monsieur de Staël is at present suspended in his embassy, but not recalled; it is yet uncertain whether the Regent-Duke of Sudermania will send him to Paris during this present horrible Convention, or order him home. He is now in Holland, waiting for commands. Madame de Staël; however, was unsafe in Paris, though an ambassadress, from the resentment owed her by the Commune. She is a woman of the first abilities, I think I have seen; she is more in the style of Mrs. Thrale than of any other celebrated character, but she has infinitely more depth, and seems even a profound politician and metaphysician. She has suffered us to hear some of her works in MS., which are truly wonderful, for powers both of thinking and expression. She adores her father, but is alarmed at having had no news from him since he has heard of the death of the martyred

'Louis. Ever since her arrival she has been pressing me to spend some time with her before I return to town. She exactly resembles Mrs. Thrale in the ardour and warmth of her partialities. I find her impossible to resist. She is only a short walk from here—at Juniper Hall. There can be nothing imagined more charming, more fascinating than this little colony ; between their sufferings and their *agrémens* they occupy us almost wholly. Monsieur de Narbonne bears the highest character for goodness, parts, sweetness of temper, and ready wit. He has been much affected by the king's death, but relieved by hearing through Monsieur de Malesherbes that his master retained a regard for him to the last."

Madame de Staël occasionally practised English composition in letters to her clever young friend "Evelina." Here is a specimen:—

"When I learned to read english, J begun by milton, to know all or renounce at all in once. J follow the same system in writing my first english letter to Miss burney ; after such an enterprize nothing can affright me. J feel for her so tender a friendship that it melts my

admiration, inspires my heart with hope of her indulgence, and impresses me with the idea that in a tongue even unknown, I could express sentiments so deeply felt. my servant will return for a french answer. I entreat Miss burney to correct the words, but to preserve the sense of that card. best compliments to my dear protectress, Madame Philippe.”

For some few weeks the intercourse between Norbury Park and Juniper Hall was warmly maintained. Frequent *réunions* were held; sometimes at the one house, sometimes at the other. Madame de Staël would not only charm her hearers with the inexhaustible wealth of her conversation, but declaim for their amusement the tragedy of *Tancrède*, or read the opening portions of her new book “Of the Passions.” Talleyrand gave a *piquant* flavour to the conversation with his Attic salt,—which, sometimes, was almost as pungent as vitriol. He condemned Madame de Staël’s manner of reading. “You read prose very badly,” he said; “you have a sing-song manner, a cadence, and a monotony not at all agreeable; in listening to you, one fancies it is all in verse, and that has

a very poor effect." Few authors read their own works with any degree of animation or power of expression.

Into this Eden of wit and sentiment, however, the serpent soon found its way. The French aristocratic refugees who were petted and patronized at the English court hated the constitutionalists only less than the revolutionists, and as Necker had been the most distinguished of the moderate party, now gratified their vindictiveness by reviving the old scandals of Paris to the injury of Necker's daughter. We get the first hint of this malicious movement in a letter from Dr. Burney to his daughter, dated February the 19th, 1793.

"I am not at all surprised," he writes, "at your account of the captivating powers of Madame de Staël. It corresponds with all I had heard about her, and with the opinion I formed of her intellectual and literary powers in reading her charming little '*Apologie de Rousseau*.' But as nothing human is allowed to be perfect, she has not escaped censure. Her house was the centre of the revolutionists previous to the 10th of August, and she has been

accused of partiality to Monsieur de Narbonne. But, perhaps, all may be Jacobinical malignity. However, unfavourable stories have been brought hither, and the Burkes and Mrs. Ord have repeated them to me. But you know that Monsieur Necker's administration and the conduct of the nobles who first joined in the violent measures that subverted the ancient establishments, by the abolition of nobility, and the ruin of the Church during the first National Assembly [in 1789], are held in greater horror by the aristocrats than even the members of the present Convention. If you are not absolutely in the house of Madame de Staël, perhaps it may be possible for you to waive the visit to her."

Miss Burney replies:—*

"I am both hurt and astonished at the acrimony of malice; indeed, I believe all this party [of the *émigrés*] to merit nothing but honour, compassion, and praise. Madame de Staël, the daughter of Monsieur Necker, the idolizing daughter, of course, and from the best

* Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay

motives, those of filial reverence, entered into the opening of the revolution just as her father entered into it; but as to her house having become the centre of the revolutionists before the 10th of August, it was only so for the constitutionalists, who at that period were not only members of the then established government, but friends of the king. The aristocrats were then already banished, or wanderers from fear, or silent from cowardice; and the Jacobins, I need not, after what I have already related, tell you how utterly abhorrent to her must be that fiend-like set. The aristocrats, however, as you will observe, and as she has herself told me, hold the constitutionalists in greater horror than the convention itself. The malignant assertions which persecute her, all of which she has lamented to us, she imputes equally to the bad and virulent of both parties. The intimation concerning Monsieur de N. was, however, wholly new to us, and I do firmly believe it a gross calumny. Monsieur de N. was of her society, which contained ten or twelve of the first people, and occasionally almost all Paris; she loves him even tenderly, but so openly, so

unaffectedly, so simply, and with such utter freedom from coquetry, that were they two men or two women, the affection could not I think be more obviously undesigning. She is very plain, he is very handsome, her intellectual endowments must be with him her chief attraction. Monsieur de Talleyrand was another of her society, and she seems equally attached to him. In short, her whole *coterie* live together as brothers. Madame la Marquise de la Châtre, and Madame de Beaumont, a daughter of the unhappy Montmorin (one of the victims of the reign of Terror—an ex-Minister of Louis XVI.) are also with Madame de Staël. Indeed, I think you could not pass a day with them, and not see that their commerce is that of pure, but exalted and most elegant friendship. Nevertheless, I would give the world to avoid being even a guest under their roof, now I have heard the shadow of such a rumour.”

Such was the generosity of the author of “Evelina!” Convinced of her friend’s innocence, she nevertheless yielded to the fear of what would Mrs. Grundy say. It was nothing that Madame de Staël was a foreigner, a woman of

remarkable genius and strong affections, who had warmly reciprocated the advances of pretty Fanny;" the shadow of a rumour alarmed her worldly spirit, and she had not the courage, nor the magnanimity to vindicate her friend's fame from the most fatal aspersion that could be flung upon it.

Madame de Staël did not resent the sudden coldness of the Burney, but addressed to her a letter in which she quietly referred her feelings for handsome Monsieur de Narbonne to friendship. No doubt, these Platonic intimacies are often very suspicious, but French nature is not English nature, and Madame de Staël was hardly the woman to kindle a guilty affection in the breast of a refined and gallant gentleman. Her passionate nature, however, wildly fretted against the restriction of social conventionalities, and she was often guilty of proprieties which her friends regretted, though aware of the innocence of her motives. Mrs. Phillips—Evelina's sister—saw all this with the keen eyes of a discriminating woman. "Madame de Staël," she writes, "is, with all her wildness and blemishes, a delightful companion ;

and Monsieur de Narbonne rises upon me in esteem and affection every time I see him. Their minds, in some points, ought to be exchanged ; for he is, as delicate as a really feminine woman, and evidently suffers when he sees her setting *les bienséances* aside, as it often enough befalls her to do."

But she was now withdrawn from the prudery of Miss Burney by her husband's summons to join him in Holland. Monsieur de Narbonne remained in England, and Monsieur d'Arblay continued to read English and French with the author of "Evelina." Their friendship finally resulted in marriage, but neither of them ever renewed their former intercourse with the impulsive but gifted "Corinne."

IV.

Madame de Staël did not long remain in Holland, but in the summer of 1793 rejoined her parents at Coppet.

Here she found numerous opportunities of displaying that generosity of heart and true nobility of nature which lay at the bottom of all her foibles, by affording protection and shelter to the unhappy emigrants whom the cruelty of the Revolutionary Government drove from their desolated homes. She invented Swedish names for them, and her husband then claimed the right of protecting them as subjects of the country which, as ambassador, he represented. "We thought ourselves justified in deceiving tyranny," she said; and he must be a severe moralist who can venture to blame her. Once she provided a Monsieur Achille du Chayla, a nephew of Monsieur de Jancourt, with a Swiss passport. Its authenticity was suspected, and he was arrested. To procure his release, it was necessary that his identity as a native of the Pays de Vaud should be attested by the lieutenant baillival of the district, Monsieur de Reverdil. This magistrate was an old friend of Madame de Staël's, and a man of warm and generous feelings. She accordingly repaired to him, and in a protracted interview, besought him to furnish her with the

necessary attestation, to save young Du Chayla from certain death. Reverdil at first refused to commit what was virtually an act of forgery, and if discovered, must have compromised him, and embroiled Switzerland with her powerful neighbour. But Madame de Staël would not be denied, and her impetuous eloquence overpowered his attempts at argument. He made the required attestation ; Du Chayla was saved ; and morality must content herself with regretting that circumstances should render laudable, an offence against her laws.

Heaven, in its mercy, grants that no political or social convulsion shall endure beyond certain limits. All violent efforts are temporary, and even to a reign of terror there must come an end.

With the fall of Robespierre, France recovered from its mad and wicked dream of blood. Life once more became a prized and valued thing, and though society still heaved and rocked with the effects of the dreadful storm that had so recently convulsed it, a period of comparative tranquillity was nevertheless inaugurated by the establishment of a defined

and responsible government. The Directory was acknowledged by several European Powers ; by Sweden among others. The Baron de Staël was ordered to resume his ambassadorial duties at Paris, and his wife returned with delight to those scenes of social triumph so congenial to her character. Her influence procured the recall of several exiles, of whom the most remarkable was Talleyrand, destined thereafter to play so important a part in the history of his time.

At Paris, Madame de Staël was first brought into contact—we would rather say, collision—with another remarkable man, whose future *rôle* was to excel in brilliancy even that of the ex-bishop of Autun. General Bonaparte was as yet more famous for what it was believed he *could* do, than for what he *had* done ; for it is singular that everybody who met with this rising soldier, felt an immediate presentiment of his future greatness. After his marriage with Josephine Beauharnais, he had obtained the command of the army in Italy, and by his victory over the Austrians at Montenotte, (April 1796) begun that long series of splendid successes

which raised him to the imperial purple and the domination of two-thirds of Europe.

The glories of the French arms could not but impress the susceptible imagination of Madame de Staël. It is related that at a dinner-party she refused to take her place before an officer, who had been one of Bonaparte's *aides-de-camp*, saying to him, as she stepped aside, "I cannot consent to precede an *aide-de-camp* of General Bonaparte."

When the hero himself arrived in Paris in 1797, after the conclusion of the famous Treaty of Campo Formio, Madame de Staël shared in the general enthusiasm which welcomed him. At first, too, she was impressed by the moderation and simplicity of his character, the extent of his acquirements, and the profundity of his intellect. But woman reads man so much better than man does! and she soon detected the daring ambition and irresistible will concealed beneath the mask of the patriotic soldier. She saw, too, that he mistrusted and disliked her, and loved to baffle her scrutiny by the assumption of new phases of character. She was enthusiastic and impetuous; he reserved

and calculating. She revelled in ideas and sentiments; he loved facts and details—nothing so abhorrent to him as an ideologist! Greedy of fame, he was angry at the admiration she commanded; accustomed to applause, she was indignant at the scornful indifference with which he treated her. “Whom do you consider,” she inquired of him, at one of Monsieur de Talleyrand’s *soirées*, “whom do you consider the greatest woman, living or dead?” With a sarcastic smile, the general returned a jest instead of a compliment: “Her, madam, who has borne the most children.” “It is said,” she rejoined, somewhat angrily, “that you are not very friendly to the sex.” “I am passionately fond of my wife, madam,” was the significant answer.

The *coup d'état* of the 18th Brumaire (A.D. 1749) took place soon afterwards, and this blow at republican government deepened Madame de Staël’s antipathy against the imperious soldier. She censured it freely, and there were spies enough at her side to make sure that those censures should reach his ears. Hereupon, he despatched his brother Joseph to

effect a reconciliation, for if he disliked the woman, he appreciated the force of her wit, and the influence she exercised upon Parisian society. "What does she want?" he said. "Her father's two millions? She shall have them. Leave to stay in Paris? She shall remain. What *does* she want? Why does she not join my side?" Joseph repeated to Madame his brother's queries, but could only obtain in reply the almost Delphic oracle, "The difficulty, sir, is not what I *want*, but what I *think*."

Among her numerous admirers—one, indeed, whose admiration almost bordered upon love—was the illustrious Benjamin Constant. His love of liberty was not less ardent than her own, and he resolved to attack the Dictator in the Tribunal. On the previous evening, her *salon* was full. He approached, and whispered in her ear, "Look around you ; those are your friends ; if I speak my speech to-morrow, not one will again attend your *salon*."

"I know it," she replied, "but you must follow the dictates of your conscience."

He spoke in the Senate, and eloquently

denounced the arbitrary conduct of the First Consul. The ten guests whom Madame de Staël had expected on the same evening, sent each a letter of excuse. Fouché soon afterwards made his appearance; complained that she had inspired Monsieur Constant's speech; and recommended her to retire into the country for a few days until the incident was forgotten. She followed the advice—which was equivalent to a command; but on returning to Paris, after temporary absence, found that Fouché's prediction was not realized, and that the First Consul's hostility was as keen as before. He was paramount everywhere, and rather than incur his displeasure, two-thirds of her friends deserted her. It amounted in fact to a social ostracism. Madame de Staël was passionately fond of society; she loved the glittering, rapid, changeful life of the *salons*; she loved admiration and incense—for though a genius, she was a woman—and this social banishment affected her deeply. To recover something of her old power, she wrote her “Discourse on Literature,” (early in 1800), and the genius that shone in every page prevailed against the dis-

favour of the First Consul. Once more her rooms were full. Two years later appeared her "Delphine," a romance of great power and painful interest, which still further extended her reputation and her intellectual ascendancy, but furnished her enemies with plausible grounds for attack. About this time, her father published his "Last Views of Politics and Finance," in which, while not openly censuring Napoleon, he nevertheless indirectly reflected, and with considerable severity, on the despotic tendencies of his system of government.

Madame de Staël, meanwhile, had paid a visit to Coppet, and would probably have enjoyed its tranquil shelter for some months, had not her husband's illness recalled her to Paris. She attempted to remove him to Switzerland by easy stages, in the hope that he might recover his health in the bland air of the Genevese lakes and groves; but he died on the road, at a village called Poligny, May 2nd, 1802.

The opposition between the powerful soldier and the influential woman of letters was now openly declared, and all who had the courage to think and speak freely on political matters, assembled

nightly in Madame de Staël's saloons. She formed an intimate alliance with Madame Récamier, who had also incurred Napoleon's hostility. But anxious to deprecate his anger, while maintaining her individual liberty, she retired from the capital itself, and took a small country house about ten leagues distant. The First Consul's vengeance was not so easily turned aside. One day, in September, 1803, while she was sitting at dinner, the commandant of the gendarmerie of Versailles made his appearance, and presented her with an order, signed by Bonaparte, to depart within four-and-twenty hours, and to a distance of not less than forty leagues from the capital. The blow was severe; for she loved society, and she was anxious for the education of her sons, Auguste and Albert. But it could not extort from her a word of homage or submission.

She lingered, however, as long as she could in the neighbourhood of all she most cherished, and obtained a delay of three days in order to make the necessary preparations for her journey. When this period had elapsed, she showed herself still unwilling to be gone. The gendarme

who had her in charge, and who complimented her upon her writings and her talents, would press her every morning to leave, and she as regularly begged for another day. At length, Monsieur de Talleyrand was commissioned to intimate that no further grace could be allowed her.

Well ; no man could betray a friend or wound an enemy with more exquisite politeness !

“Madame,” he said to her, “I wish you a pleasant journey.”

“How, Monsieur ? a pleasant journey ?”

“Yes, a pleasant journey to Switzerland. I am told that you depart in three days.”

“Ah, but you have been misinformed ! Such, at least, is not my intention.”

“That is strange, madam, for I assure you I heard it from the best authority. *Encore, bon voyage. Adieu.*”

Joseph Bonaparte made a vain attempt to obtain her pardon, but the First Consul was inflexible. He then invited her to spend the three days grace again accorded to her with his wife at Morfontaine. She went there with her eldest son, and at the expiration of this pleasant

interval, “addressed her sorrowful face towards the path of exile”—leaving behind her the beloved Paris of her hopes and aspirations, her dreams of a regenerated land, and her visions of universal liberty.

It is a grievous thing for a Frenchwoman to be banished from Paris. You deprive her at once of the best part of her existence. You suffer her to live, but bandage her eyes that she may not see the sun. You leave her in the possession of her energies, thoughts, and feelings, but exclude her from the only sphere where she can exercise them. Banish an Englishwoman from London, and she will not grieve. She will have her family cares to occupy her; the amusements and labours of a country life—her church or chapel—the Dorcas Society and the Book Club—half a hundred sources of employment and gratification. It is otherwise with the gay daughter of France.

The canary released from its gilded cage will pine and die. The Parisienne will sink into hopeless and morose melancholy, and finally throw herself into the arms of her confessor, and dwindle down into a soulless devotee. Paris is all the world to a Frenchwoman—is, very often, husband, and child, and lover ; she lives only for its fêtes, its salons, its swift intoxicating whirl of dissipation. Where else shall she display her wit, her finesse, her bonhommie, and, finally, her toilette ? Not in a French village, to the eyes of the doctor and the lawyer ; she requires a larger and more appreciating circle ; she needs Paris—without Paris she is lost.

When Madame de Staël left Paris, the world was all before her ; but, though a woman of profounder genius and deeper passions than most Frenchwomen, there seemed to her no route possible that could lead to contentment. She fixed, at length, upon a visit to Weimar, which was then a German Paris, and the continental centre of wit and learning. She proceeded thither with her children and Benjamin Constant, but was detained awhile at Frankfort by the dangerous illness of her daughter Alber-

tine. On her recovery they went on to Weimar, where the brilliant author of "Delphine" met with an enthusiastic reception from Wieland, Göthe, and Schiller. 'The Duke and Duchess treated her with marked distinction. She studied German, and learned to read it with fluency. Her observations of German character were close and acute, and here she laid the foundation of one of her ablest and best-known books, her "*De l'Allemagne*."

From Weimar she proceeded to Berlin, where she made the acquaintance of Augustus von Schlegel, one of the most learned members of a learned family. To him she entrusted the education of her son, and it is not improbable that she herself derived much advantage from constant intercourse with so large and liberal a mind. It is certain that in his correspondence with Göthe, Schlegel criticized her feelings with some severity, and asserted that she had no real sympathy with poetry—no great breadth of view or profundity of judgment—no wide sweep of imagination. He saw in her, indeed, a brilliant specimen of the French *femme d'esprit*, and recognised her powers of conversation

as superior to her powers as an author. She could not seize hold of her sparkling talk, and transfer it to the written page. In the process of distillation all that was airiest and most subtle escaped. What remained was bright, and fragrant, and very delightful; but the finest part of her genius she could not realize in her books. Whoever, after reading the biographies of Madame de Staël, and the eulogistic notices of her that occur in the writings of her contemporaries, shall turn to her "Corinne" and her "Delphine," will be sensible of a keen disappointment. He will feel that these works do not come up to the standard suggested by her biographers, and that the Madame de Staël of the "Corinne" is inferior in mind and fancy to the Madame de Staël of the *salons* of Paris.

It was during her German travels that she lost her adored father. He died, after a nine days' illness, in April, 1804. News of his danger reached her at Berlin, and she immediately set out for Coppet, but learned that all was over when she arrived at Weimar. She suffered severely. Life had hitherto been one

long dream of love for him ; henceforth it must be one long and bitter memory. Her heart so pined for love and sympathy, and he who had most nearly filled the void was now removed !

She returned to Coppet—but Coppet was hateful to her, for it constantly recalled the tenderest recollections of him who had been not only her father, but her guide, philosopher, and friend. She published a complete edition of his works, and prefixed a brief but touching memoir. Having flung this *immortelle* upon his grave, she travelled into Italy—the land of all European lands to console a great sorrow. Its exquisite scenery and glorious relics of the past had a most lively effect upon her imagination. They produced “*Corinne*.” She begun it, in 1805, on her return to France. Fouché, then Minister of Police, allowed her to approach Paris within twelve leagues, and, going beyond the permission, she ventured upon some stealthy night-visits to the well-beloved city ; but they were detected, and she was compelled to renounce them. She remained near enough, however, to superintend the production of “*Corinne*,” which, immediately upon its pub-

lication, took all Europe by storm, and was read everywhere—in Russia, France, England, Germany, and Scotland—and everywhere received the meed of enthusiastic approbation. It was a great advance upon “*Delphine* ;” but the improvisatrice, not the less, is eminently French in character, is a Parisian Sappho, and talks French sentiment instead of Italian passion. There are passages in it, however, which the world will not willingly let die.

It might have been supposed that Napoleon, the victor of Austerlitz and Jena, whose imperial throne was based upon conquered Europe, would have disdained to pursue any further his undignified warfare with a woman. But Napoleon was one of those great men who have nothing of the heroic in them. He had shrunk beneath Madame de Staël’s wit ; he resented the dignity with which she abstained from paying him homage. Every successful man has thus his Mordcai in the gate. The great Soldier who humbled Prussia and Austria, could not be happy until he had crushed Madame de Staël.

On the 9th of April, 1807, she was again, and peremptorily, exiled. There was no resource but to obey the mandate. She quitted France, and paid a second visit to Germany. At Vienna, honoured and flattered, she spent a tranquil year; and then she returned to Coppet, and employed herself upon her *magnum opus*, the finest specimen of her acute intellect and appreciative sympathies, the famous "*De L'Allemagne*." She amused herself at this time, with dramatic representations, eagerly enlisting the services of whatever wit, poet, philosopher, or politician might happen to be staying at Coppet.

"*De L'Allemagne*" was finished in the summer of 1810, and its author went on a visit to Blois—the limit within which she was permitted to approach Paris. Here she was joined by Madame Récamier and other faithful friends, and hither, too, the malignant jealousy of Napoleon pursued her.

She sent a copy of her work to the Emperor, with a noble and dignified letter—not, indeed, a letter of flattery and adulation, but of such respectful entreaty as a

woman of genius might address to a man who held his crown by right of genius—and the reply was, the suppression of all the printed copies of her book, and an order to leave France within three days.

Sick at heart, and bowed down with sorrow, she returned to Coppet, to be followed by her powerful enemy's malignity, which descended to the basest meannesses of persecution. Her friends were driven from her. Schlegel was commanded to return to Germany. Monsieur Mathieu de Montmorency and Madame Récamier were exiled, because they had visited her.

In her darkest distress it happened, however, that the love of which she had dreamed, came unexpectedly to cheer and console her. A certain Monsieur de Rocca, who had been severely wounded while fighting under Napoleon's banners in Spain—young, he was only twenty-seven, handsome, chivalrous, and accomplished—had come to Geneva to recruit his health. He saw Madame de Staël, and, though she was plain-featured and eighteen years his senior, he looked in the face of her

genius, and loved her. She inspired him with a romantic passion.

"I shall love her so much," he said, "that she will marry me in the end."

"She is old enough," rejoined a discreet friend, "to be your mother."

"I thank you," he replied, in splendid exaggeration, "for having given me an additional reason to love her."

Madame de Staël could not resist the influence of so romantic a devotion, and consented to become his wife. Afraid, perhaps, that any publicity would recall to Napoleon his young soldier's name, and induce him to aim a blow at him which would also recoil upon her—by summoning him to join the army; or unwilling to exchange the brilliant De Staël for the unknown Rocca, she insisted upon keeping her marriage secret. It was an unwise step, which led to sorrowful complications, and afforded Napoleon's agents an easy means of shadowing her fame, and augmenting her own uneasiness.

So incessant was the persecution, so ubiquitous the espionage to which this unfortunate

woman was, for many months, subjected, that she at length determined, at any risk, to effect her escape. An additional inducement was provided, in the spring of 1812, by her pregnancy; a circumstance which would either compel her to the humiliation of confessing her marriage, or injure her reputation if she concealed it. Her object was to reach England; but she knew that the ports of every country over which Napoleon held sway would be closed against her, and her only means of carrying out her purpose was by a journey to Russia, to set out from some Russian harbour. Having made her preparations with the utmost secrecy, Madame de Staël, and her sons and daughter, started from Coppet on the 23rd of May; drove on to Berne, where they met Schlegel at a farmhouse; joined M. de Rocca at Salzburg; and reached Vienna on the 6th of June. Here she was warmly received by the Russian Ambassador, who sent to St. Petersburg to procure a passport. But, finding herself dogged by the Austrian police, and dreading that Napoleon might compel the subservient court to give her up, she determined on flying into

Galicia, while her husband preceded her, in disguise, to escape the order which the Emperor had issued for his arrest in the quality of a French officer.

Madame de Staël traversed Moravia, wandered through Poland, and, being overtaken by a courier with the long-wished for Russian passport, and joined on her route by De Rocca, entered Russia in safety, after a period of intense suffering. With joyful speed she flew onward to St. Petersburg, and there, for the first time, experienced a sense of security—so all-pervading was Napoleon's mysterious power, and so complete the ascendancy he maintained over two-thirds of Europe.

The Emperor Alexander received her with dignified courtesy, and often engaged in conversation with her. It was to her he made the eminently happy reply, when she complimented him on his liberal sympathies and enlightened government of his people:

“Admitting that to be true; you must allow, after all, madame, that I am only a lucky accident.”

• The principal Russian nobles overwhelmed

her with kindly hospitalities, and her stay at St. Petersburg was a pleasant episode in her chequered career.

Towards the close of September she left Russia, and proceeded to Sweden, where she completed her work "On Suicide," originally begun in 1811, and intended as an expiation of her former errors on the subject. Suffering and sorrow had strengthened her faith, and taught her the wisdom and blessedness of patience. She no longer thought man justified in giving up his soul to its Creator before it was required of him, and felt that it was the act of a coward who lacked the courage to hope and the energy to atone.

In 1813 she reached England, whose free and liberal atmosphere was always so nourishing to her mind and heart. Here she published her *De L'Allemagne*. On her former visit she had been a neglected and proscribed exile; she was now received with the welcome due to her genius and her noble sympathies with freedom. She evidently appreciated her flattering reception:—

"The English," she said, "are like the

Albanian dogs sent by Porus to Alexander, who disdained to fight any animal but a lion." Alas! they have sometimes been deceived by an ass in a lion's skin!

She mingled now in the brightest and most distinguished society, and from the correspondence of some of the great men of that brilliant era we obtain interesting glimpses of her character, and evidences of the impression produced by her conversational powers.

Sir James Mackintosh writes :— "Madame de Staël, the most celebrated woman of this, or perhaps any age, treats me as the person she most delights to honour. I am generally ordered with her to dinner, as one orders beans and bacon. I have in consequence dined with her at the houses of almost all the Cabinet Ministers. She is one of the few persons who surpass expectation. She has every sort of talent, and would be universally popular if in society she were to confine herself to her inferior talents—pleasantry, anecdote, and literature, which are so much more suited to conversation than her eloquence and genius." . . . "I saw

Lord Wellesley [the Duke of Wellington's able brother] fight a very good battle with her, at Holland House, on the Swedish treaty ; indeed, he had the advantage of her, by the politeness, vivacity, and grace with which he parried her eloquent and unseasonable discussions."

Mrs. Opie relates an amusing anecdote:—

"She had recently left the court of Bernadotte, and from time to time indulged herself in descanting in his praise. At length, she produced a portrait in miniature of her favourite, painted in profile, and when it had gone round the greater part of the circle, she put it into the hand of Sir Henry Englefield, well known as a man of virtue, science, and taste for the fine arts ; and while she stood by the side of the chair on which he was indolently lounging, she evidently waited with much anxiety the result of his examination. Carefully and long did he examine the painting, and then holding it up to the light which hung near him, he observed with slow, distinct utterance, and in rather a loud voice, 'He is like a ferocious sheep!' on which, uttering an exclamation of justly indignant surprise,

Madame de Staël snatched the miniature from him, and turned hastily away."

Here is a passage from Byron's Diary :—

" Asked for Wednesday to dine and meet the Staël—asked particularly, I believe, out of mischief, to see the first interview after the note, with which Corinne professes herself to be much taken, I don't much like it; she always talks of myself and herself, and I am not (except in soliloquy) much enamoured of either subject—especially one's works. What the devil shall I say about 'De L'Allemagne?' I like it prodigiously; but unless I can twist my admiration into some fantastical expression, she won't believe me; and I know, by experience, I shall be overwhelmed with fine things about rhyme, &c., &c. The lover, Mr. ——— was there to-night, and C—— said, 'it was the only proof *he* had seen of her good taste.' Monsieur l'Amant [Rocca] is remarkably handsome; but I don't think more so than her book."

During her triumphs in England she received the sorrowful intelligence of the death in a duel of her younger son, Baron Albert de

Stael, who had given promise of a generous mind and chivalrous spirit. This was a severe blow both to her and his brother, who had loved him with almost paternal affection.

Napoleon's abdication in 1814 enabled her to return to Paris, but she was soon forced to quit it again for her Swiss seclusion. The hero of the Hundred Days, indeed, was willing to have conciliated his enemy, and invited her to come back: "her presence," he said, "was required in Paris to promote constitutional ideas." She replied keenly: "He has done without either a constitution or me for the last twelve years, and even now he is not much fonder of one than of the other."

After the decisive day of Waterloo, Madame de Staël felt that her personal peace was secured. To recruit her prostrate energies, and Monsieur de Rocca's shattered health, she visited Italy, where, in February 1816, her daughter Albertine was married to the Duc de Broglie. She then returned to Coppet, and assembled around her much pleasant and brilliant society; and again astonished and charmed her visitors with the astounding wealth and brilliancy of

her conversation. Yet to all it was evident that the supreme hour was rapidly approaching. Her health sank fast, and when she returned to Paris in the autumn, those who knew her best were most astonished at the rapid ravages of disease. Life gradually left the extremities, and her limbs were helpless some time before her heart failed her, or her mind grew weak. The day before her death she read a portion of Lord Byron's *Manfred*, and dwelt with peculiar satisfaction upon those beautiful but melancholy passages in which the poet idealizes his indifference to life, and his scorn of the world. As the night approached she became so feeble that it was evident death was at hand. She accordingly bade adieu to her son, commending to him the child of her second marriage—which she now revealed—and tried to take a last farewell of her daughter, but was hindered by the weakness of the mother's heart. Benjamin Constant, who had once loved and always esteemed her, sat up with her during these last sad hours. She often ejaculated, "God is good, he will soften the last struggle—" "Merciful Saviour!—" "Oh ;

forgive me!" and, at four o'clock on the morning of the 14th of July, 1817, passed away in tranquil sleep, aged 51. Her husband survived but six months the gifted woman whom he had so passionately loved.

She had had many admirers, but few friends, and her death was a sad commentary on the hollow splendours of her career. She went down to the grave unnoticed, almost unlamented. No one had a wreath to fling upon the tomb of the woman who so singularly had illustrated the mingled virtues and errors of her time; who had so constantly espoused the cause of liberty: and so vigorously defended the truth and the right, notwithstanding the occasional eccentricities of an impetuous spirit. France did itself but little honour in honouring so little the memory of its most gifted woman. For though her genius is inadequately expressed in her writings, enough is shown to vindicate their claim to a high position in French literature; and *Corinne* and *L'Allemagne* will long be read with interest and admiration.

In tracing her career, however, one becomes painfully conscious of a something wanting to

perfect and complete it. With all her brilliancy, and generosity, her high aspirations and liberal sympathies, she does not command one's love. A woman of strong affections, she nevertheless shows no *home-side* to her life; she lived too much in the glare of the lamps, and fed too eagerly upon the applause of the crowd. In her idealization of passion, she wandered too far astray from principle; and in her keen appreciation of the consequences of actions, paid too little heed to the philosophy of motive. She did right by impulse, not upon cool and deliberate judgment. Thus, to the patient analyst, her career must always seem imperfect, and he will not fail to regret that so prodigal an expenditure of power accomplished so little permanent good. He will admire, most heartily, her wealth of *forgiveness*; her inexhaustible kindness; her passionate admiration of truth and beauty; her noble scorn of meanness; her incapability of jealousy or envy; he will deplore very sorrowfully her worship of the end, her indifference to fixed principles, her ready submission to the gusts of passion. But the good and the evil of her career have passed away, and

she herself has entered that *cætum concilium que divinum* of immortal spirits, who repose in the serene lustre of assured fame, to encourage us by their inspiration, or warn us by their example. That passionate heart and restless erring brain have long been still ; but something of the life-blood of her genius still throbs and glows in the eloquent pages of *Corinne* and *Delphine*.

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S A R A H,
DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH.

A.D. 1660—1774.

hood gave promise of the possession of no ordinary personal attractions. Both sisters were sent to shine at court at an early age, though the Court of the Restoration was by no means a fitting school for young and lovely girls.

Frances preceded her sister in this new life, and her *débût* excited great admiration. She was soon established as a leading beauty. The wits swore by her, and the women railed at her, the double homage which society pays to a pretty woman's charms. In the picture gallery of De Grammont, her portrait is one of the most attractive. "She had the fairest and brightest complexion," writes Count Hamilton, "that ever was seen. Her hair was of a most exquisite flaxen; there was something peculiarly vivacious and animated in her countenance, which preserved it from the insipidity that frequently attends a very fair complexion. If her mouth was not the smallest, it was the handsomest in the world. Nature had endowed her with all those attractions that are indescribable, and the graces had put to them the finishing stroke. The turn of her face was admirably fine, and her swelling neck was as

fair and bright as her face. In a word, her person gave the idea of Aurora, or the Goddess of the Spring, such as youthful poets fancy when they love. And not only was her form and face thus attractive, but her mind was richly endowed with wit and sprightliness. Her gestures and movements were easy and unaffected. Her conversation was bewitching when she had a wish to please—piercing and delicate when she had a mind for raillery. But her imagination was quick, and her tongue sometimes outstripped her imagination.

The Duke of York soon declared himself her lover, but *la belle* Jennings, in her country home, had imbibed some old-fashioned sentiments upon the value of chastity to a woman, and she repulsed his advances with open contempt. He expressed his passion on paper, but she would not receive the paper. Every day, billets, containing the tenderest expressions and most magnificent promises, were slipped into her pockets or her muff. But this could not be done unperceived, and the “malicious little gipsy” took care that those who saw them slip in, should also see them slip out, unperused and—

unopened. She only shook her muff, or pulled out her handkerchief, and as soon as the Duke's back was turned, his billets flew about like hailstones. Who pleased might pick them up.

After various flirtations, she married Sir George Hamilton, who speedily left her a widow, and she then took for her second husband, Richard Talbot, who had been an old admirer. Talbot attached himself warmly to James II., and followed him into France. His loyalty was rewarded by his elevation to the Dukedom of Tyrconnel. The Duchess visited England in 1705, and, according to Walpole, was reduced to such distress, being unable for some time to procure secret access to her family, that "she hired one of the stalls under the Royal Exchange, and maintained herself by the sale of small articles of haberdashery." From disguising herself in a white dress and a white mask, she obtained the *sobriquet* of the "White Milliner."

Through the influence of her sister, she obtained the restoration of part of her husband's property, and, in 1706, retired to Dublin. There, on the site of her husband's house, she

established a nunnery of the order of Poor Clares, and in entire seclusion from the world, passed the remainder of her varied life in acts of devotion. Her death was miserable. One bitter winter night, she fell out of her bed ; and being too feeble to rise or call for assistance, was discovered next morning lying on the floor in a state of insensibility. Her attendants were unable to restore warmth or motion to her frozen limbs ; and after lingering a few hours in a lethargic condition, she passed away in death, on the 29th of February, 1730, aged 82.

Sarah Jennings, the sister of this remarkable woman, was destined to a somewhat fairer fate, though in her case, too, the success and splendour of mature womanhood were contrasted with a dreary and unhappy old age. She was introduced at court at the early age of twelve, and attached to the household of the Duchess of York as a maid of honour. The Duchess distinguished her with particular favour, and she became the playmate and companion of her daughter, the Princess Anne, thus laying the foundations of a friendship, which

afterwards rose into historical importance. Mary of Modena, who in 1672, became the second Duchess of York, continued to her the favour she had enjoyed under her first mistress. Though not so singularly beautiful as her sister Frances, she was nevertheless very lovely, and her commanding figure and handsome face attracted numerous admirers. Her countenance was round and mignonne; a nose, slightly retroussé lent to it a peculiar air of vivacity and archness; her deep blue eyes seemed full of feeling; her mouth was small and delicately shaped—a winning smile continually hovered about it; the forehead was white and broad; the auburn hair rolled upon her lovely shoulders in masses of glossy curls. She was a woman formed to win and command, to attract by the piquant character of her beauty, and retain by the superior powers of her mind; a woman who in a humble station would assuredly have risen superior to it, as in a commanding and lofty one she showed herself equal to its responsibilities. The sweet and tender countenance did not betray the violent temper with which the fairy that had bestowed so many gifts

neutralized them all; and yet that violence of temper sprang from a lofty and elevated nature—a nature impatient of littleness, sensible of its own powers, disdainful of petty ambitions, and very capable of generous sympathies.

Sarah Jennings, even in her youthful years, received many offers of marriage from persons of consideration. She refused them all, to accept one that in a worldly point of view, seemed the least auspicious. Among the Duke of York's gentlemen of the bed-chamber, was a certain Colonel John Churchill, son of Sir Winston Churchill, a loyal but needy cavalier, who had impoverished himself in the Civil Wars to serve his king. Young Churchill, by extraordinary gallantry and address, and by the influence of his sister Arabella, who was a mistress of the Duke of York, had risen rapidly in the military profession; and his handsome person and fascinating manners made him at court "the observed of all observers." He was ten years older than Sarah Jennings, of whom he became enamoured when she was in her sixteenth year, and whose heart that had proved so cold to others, succumbed at once to this irresistible.

cavalier. It is no slight proof of the good qualities that belonged to the nature of both these remarkable persons that they remained faithful to each other during a courtship of three years' duration. It did not pass, however, without those occasional shadows that render the sunshine of love all the more attractive by contrast, those little outbreaks of temper which serve to remind the lover of his mistress's humanity; but in the letters that passed between the two, the easy amiability of Churchill's disposition is quite as evident as the petulant vivacity of the beautiful Jennings. The main obstacle to their marriage was Churchill's straitened means. His income was wholly made up of the emoluments of his places at court, and an annuity of £500 which he had purchased from Lord Halifax with money given him by the Duchess of Cleveland. The lady's fortune was also small, for her father's estate was burthened with provisions for numerous kinsmen. The Duchess of York offered her aid, but it was refused, and Sarah, indignant at the excessive prudence of her lover, threatened to terminate their engagement, and join her

sister Frances in Paris. At this menace the lover's economy gave way. He besought her to change her cruel resolution, and did not plead in vain. They were married, but secretly; the Duchess of York being their only confidant, and so well was the mystery maintained that in after years both the husband and the wife were unable to clear it up, and all that can be ascertained is, that the marriage certainly took place early in 1678. He continued to address his wife as "Miss Jennings;" and remaining attached to the Duke of York's service, was compelled to move from place to place; always addressing the most impassioned letters to his beautiful Sarah, which throw a strange light upon the character of this usually serene and imperturbable man. •

About the time of his marriage he was appointed to the colonelcy of a regiment of foot, and shortly afterwards was employed by the King on a mission to the Prince of Orange. From Brussels he wrote to his wife:—

"I write to you from Antwerp, which I hope you have received before now; for I would be glad you should hear from me by every post.

I met with some difficulties in my business with the Prince of Orange, so that I was forced to write to England, which will cause me to be two or three days longer abroad than I should have been. But because I would lose no time, I despatch all other things in the meantime, for I do with all my heart and soul long to be with you, you being dearer to me than my own life. On Sunday morning I shall leave this place, so that on Monday at night I shall be at Breda, where the Prince and Princess of Orange are; and from thence you shall be sure to hear from me again. Till when, my soul's soul, farewell."

When the Duke of York was compelled, by a violent outburst of popular feeling, to quit England, in March, 1679, Churchill attended him, and was accompanied by his wife, who still filled a post in the Duchess's household. Afterwards, when James established his residence in Scotland, Churchill still attended him, but his wife remained in London. It was thus that, for two or three years, fate tantalized them with these occasional separations.

On the 19th of July, 1681, was born their first daughter, Henrietta, afterwards Duchess

of Marlborough in her own right. Her father was absent at the time, but received an animated description of the infant from the proud mother. He wrote in reply :—

“I hope all the red spots of our child will be gone, against I see her, and her nose strait, so that I may fancy it to be like the mother; for as she has your coloured hair, I would have her be like you in all things else.”

The lover was still strong in the husband, and remained so to the last; and the placid Marlborough, who rode on the whirlwind of battle and controlled the storm of war, cherished the household affections as tenderly as any private English gentleman.

His devotion to James was now rewarded by his elevation to the pœrage, as Baron Churchill, of Aymouth, in Scotland; and, in 1683, he was appointed colonel of the royal regiment of Horseguards, then newly raised. But a more important advancement was the appointment of his wife, on the marriage of the Princess Anne, to the post of lady of her royal highness's bedchamber. A warm friendship already subsisted between them, or rather that

degree of attachment which proceeds from the influence of a strong mind over a weak one, but from this time dates an intimacy of the closest and most confidential character. The Princess was thenceforth guided by her imperious favourite as surely as any *roi fainéant* of the old French monarchy by his "mayor of the palace." And vast as was this influence, we must own that it was exercised, on the whole, for the advancement of the interests of England, and that it inspired Anne, when afterwards queen, in the adoption of a bold and generous policy. But never was friendship between mistress and servant conducted on terms of greater equality. To do away with that restraint which the use of such titles as "your Highness" and "your Ladyship" might engender, Anne proposed that these forms should be laid aside, and that both should place themselves on the same democratic level. To indicate the candour of her nature, Lady Churchill assumed the name of "Mrs. Freeman;" the Princess had not wit enough to be symbolical, and rested content with plain "Mrs. Morley." She addressed to her friend a letter

which actually commanded the greatest frankness :—

“ If you will not let me have,” she wrote, “ the satisfaction of hearing from you again before I see you, let me beg of you not to call me ‘ your Highness ’ at every word, but to be as free with me as one friend ought to be with another ; and you can never give me any greater proof of your friendship than in telling me your mind freely in all things, which I do beg you to do ; and if ever it were in my power to serve, nobody would be more ready than myself.”

Alas ! Anne had not the magnanimity for which she gave herself credit, nor Mrs. Freeman the delicacy which could use such a freedom without exaggeration. • Friendship will not bear the constant application of so sharp a test as Mrs. Morley was anxious to have employed. There are limits, easily reached, to the reproach or advice that we can bear from our dearest friends, and, however boldly we may challenge it, he who would retain our affections will be too wise to hazard the language of honesty. Frank counsel makes bitter

foes. We are never so well pleased as when our friends not only shut their eyes to our faults, but persuade us to shut our own. The worst service you can do your friend, if 'you would' preserve his friendship, is to hold up the mirror in which he may too clearly see himself.

There was no harmony of tastes between the Princess and her favourite, and their long friendship can only be explained by the fact that it was submission on the one side, and absolute power on the other. The Princess was taciturn, dull, heavy, and narrow-minded; Lady Churchill was full of vivacity, fluent of speech, generous and liberal in her sympathies. But Anne was not without a certain kind of ambition, and had sense enough to perceive that the projects which floated dimly through her brain could only be realized by some bolder intellect and stronger will than her own. Therefore she leaned upon the strong arm of her favourite while she trod a thorny and difficult path. She gave herself up to implicit submission, so long as it could promote her schemes of aggrandizement. But when power was gained, and the dream realized, she soon

became anxious to get rid of the servant who had guided her so ably, and supported her so zealously; and it may be suspected that her dislike of the haughty Marlborough begun the moment she felt securely seated on the English throne. Mean minds resent the favours that have served them most, and recal with indignation the reproofs they themselves solicited and the advice they cordially welcomed.

The accession and coronation of James II. were followed by new honours for the fortunate Marlborough. He was raised to the English peerage in May, 1684. For his services in the brief insurrection of the unfortunate Monmouth he was promoted to the rank of major-general, and after the fatal field of Sedgmoor received the colonelcy of the third troop of horse-guards. The deliberate measures adopted by the king for the re-establishment of the power of the Romish Church, he viewed, however, with suspicion and alarm; and he opened a communication with the Prince of Orange in common with the other great English nobles, who accomplished the Revolution of 1688. He deserted the royal cause when William

landed in England, and carried to the Deliverer his influence over the army, his matchless military talents, and remarkable political sagacity. He brought a yet more valuable ally in the Princess Anne, who, at the advice of her dear Mrs. Freeman, abandoned her father, and neglected her filial duties for the promotion of her own interest. She had never liked her step-mother, the cold and correct Mary of Modena; and she had refused to believe in her accouchement of a Prince of Wales. By espousing William's cause she had, therefore, everything to gain. William and his wife were childless, and there was little prospect of any issue. She was thus the next heir to the crown, if the claims of James's son were swept aside. But if she remained constant to her father, she must acknowledge the legitimacy of the young prince, and interpose an insuperable obstacle between the throne and herself. Whatever then Mrs. Freeman might have advised, we may be sure that Mrs. Morley would have followed the dictates of her own interest, which was also the interest of her son, the Duke of Gloucester, then a child of two years old.

As soon as King William established himself at St. James', the Princess Anne returned to Whitehall; and in due time the husband of Mrs. Freeman was created Earl of Marlborough. But notwithstanding occasional gleams of favour, the Marlboroughs, during the reign of William, were under a cloud. The earl intrigued with the exiled monarch, and the countess offended William by her brusquerie, and her open dislike of his consort Mary. They were further obnoxious to him as the favourites and advisers of the Princess Anne, whose position necessarily rendered her an object of suspicion—whose claims to the throne were so much more powerful than his own. The court of St James was profoundly jealous of the court of Whitehall; and if at the former were more splendour, and real power, at the latter shone all the wit and talent of social London. The beauty of the countess attracted thither the rising statesman and the ambitious poet. Thither went courtier and diplomatist to bask in the radiance of the rising sun. The lively wit and satiric temper of Mrs Freeman there exercised itself, unchecked by Anne, on

that "Caliban," King William, nor did it spare his reserved and austere wife. Nothing was too great and nothing too small for the comprehensive intellect which Nature had so lavishly endowed. It criticized the queen's dress, and detected the subtle phases of William's European policy. It seconded the ambitious projects of her husband's treason.

When, therefore, in 1691, William discovered the full extent of Marlborough's schemes, and suddenly dismissed him from all his offices, he not unjustly expected that the countess would be included in the disgrace. The details of Marlborough's double-dealing were accordingly made known to the Princess Anne. Three weeks passed, and still the Princess retained at her side the wife of the disgraced statesman. The haughty countess made no sign of retreating even for a time from her post of honour and influence. But she not only shone in all her splendour at Whitehall. She did more. She resolved to brave the king and queen even in their own palace, and attended her mistress one evening to the drawing-room at Kensington. The placid and self-restrained

nature of Mary gave way beneath so glaring an insult. As her sister was then in a condition which requires indulgence, she made no public scandal ; but the next day intimated to her that, though unwilling to give pain to one whom she so dearly loved, she must insist on the dismissal of Lady Marlborough. She might have endured her retention, as she had endured so many other insults, had not Anne brought the countess to defy the king and queen in their own presence-chamber. "It was unkind," Mary wrote, "in a sister ; it would have been uncivil in an equal ; and I need not say that I have more to claim."

Anne, in her answer, skillfully passed over all allusion to Marlborough's treachery, but insisted on his wife's innocence, and implored the queen not to insist on so painful an act of obedience. "There is no misery," she wrote, "that I cannot resolve to suffer rather than the thoughts of parting from her." No one would bear the letter to the queen, and it was despatched by a common servant. The only reply was a command for Lady Marlborough immediately to quit the palace.

As Mrs. Freeman could not stay with Mrs. Morley, Mrs. Morley determined to go with Mrs. Freeman. The Princess and her family, therefore, retired to Sion House, on the bank of the Thames; and in London selected for their residence Berkeley House, which stood in Piccadilly, on the site now occupied by Devonshire House. An open war prevailed between Anne and the queen, and the town laughed at the lampoons in which the wits celebrated, not with too much decency, the loves and sorrows of Mrs. Morley and Mrs. Freeman. The rancour had not died out—for Anne possessed all that obstinacy and phlegm which the Stuarts loved to look upon as heroic firmness—when the queen was seized with an attack of the small-pox. Of that disease few, in those dark days of medical science, recovered, and in this case, as in most cases, it proved fatal. In the presence of death the ancient enmities faded away. Anne herself was in delicate health, but on hearing of her sister's illness, sent a kind message—received a gracious answer—and proposed to call upon her. But the queen was then in extreme danger, and William

declined the offer. The excitement of such an interview might have an ill effect on both sisters. If a favourable change took place, Her Royal Highness would be gladly welcomed at Kensington. It happened, therefore, that the angry interview which Mrs. Freeman attended was the last between the two sisters.

The death of Mary completely changed the policy of Marlborough, and Marlborough's party; of whom Godolphin was the able lieutenant. While Mary lived, the prospect of Anne's succession seemed so distant that Marlborough might well think that he had very little interest in maintaining the order of things established by the Revolution. But Mary dead, there was no one between the throne and Anne except the sickly and feeble William, who might be said to live rather by the energy of his mind than his physical faculties, and whose death assuredly could not be very far distant. In the court of Anne he would shine conspicuous as its chief noble, and his genius as a statesman and a soldier would give him a foremost place in the councils and armies—not of England only—but of Europe.

Thenceforth, therefore, it became his interest to maintain the settlement of the Crown established by the Convention, and to secure the peaceable succession of Mrs. Freeman's Mrs. Morley.

Instigated by the Churchills, the princess accordingly made overtures to William ; visited him at Kensington, and was graciously received. The honours of royalty were restored to her ; and she was lodged in apartments at St. James'. Foreign ministers were again presented to her, and once more a brilliant and a lively court gathered round her. In due time, Marlborough received some marks of William's favour ; was restored to his military rank and employments ; and appointed preceptor to the young Duke of Gloucester. The king paid him a graceful compliment on delivering the prince into his care.—“Teach him,” he said, “to be like yourself, and he will not want accomplishments.”*

From that time, until the envy and hatred of Harley, and the mistakes of his impetuous

* The compliment was also a reproach, and as such, it is probable, Marlborough felt it. The young Duke died on the 30th of July, 1700.

wife, obscured his career and clouded his fame, the fortunes of the great Marlborough rolled onward like a stream which increases in fulness and glory with every league of its course. And Mrs. Freeman daily waxed more imperious and wilful ; more confident in her own mental resources, less tender of Mrs. Morley's failings ; until Mrs. Morley acquired the power she had thirsted after, and no longer needed an impetuous adviser but an obsequious confidant. The rôle of the one was played by the haughty Sarah ; who could fill the other so well as the supple Abigail Hill ?

At this period Marlborough's family consisted of one son, John, Marquis of Blandford, and four daughters, Henrietta, Anne, Elizabeth, and Mary. The two eldest were now marriageable, and being distinguished for their beauty, their accomplishments, and the good fortune of their parents, attracted many suitors who, in point of rank and wealth, seemed eligible. Other considerations, however, guided the earl and count in their choice ; the claims of party and friendship had to be weighed ; and it was, therefore, with peculiar satisfaction that

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they witnessed the growth of an attachment between Francis, Lord Rialton, the only son of Lord Godolphin, and Lady Henrietta Churchill. Their marriage took place in 1698. Lady Anne, who is spoken of as the favourite daughter, found a husband in Lord Spencer, the son of the Earl of Sunderland, and their nuptials were celebrated at St. Alban's in January, 1699-1700. Thus, the ties of family as well as the bonds of political interest united the three great statesmen—Marlborough, Godolphin, and Sunderland; but neither of the alliances concluded under such splendid auspices proved happy. Lady Rialton, afterwards Duchess of Marlborough in her own right, formed an absurd attachment for Congreve, the dramatist, and after his death, had a wax figure made to resemble him, which filled his accustomed seat at her table. A bitter hostility existed between her and her mother, who survived her.

Lady Anne found a gloomy tyrant in the sedate son of the astute Sunderland, and to compensate herself for her home unhappiness plunged into political intrigues. From the smallness of her stature and the malignity of her

party spirit she became known as the Little Whig. She died, while still young, of consumption.

This seems the most convenient place to record that the third daughter, Lady Elizabeth, wedded the Earl of Bridgewater, and had the good fortune to be immortalized by Pope:—

“Hence, Beauty waking, all her forms supplies,
An angel’s sweetness in Bridgewater’s eyes.”

Lady Mary Churchill married the Duke of Montague, and amused herself with constant bickerings with her mother. “I wonder you and your mother cannot agree,” said Marlborough, calmly; “you are so alike.” But beauty and temper were the two characteristics of the Churchills.

The accession of Anne to the throne in 1702, seemed to complete the prosperity of the Churchills. They were still necessary in her councils, and she lavished favours upon them with an unsparing hand. Marlborough was honoured with the Garter, and appointed captain-general of the English forces at home and abroad. The countess received the Ranger-

ship of Windsor Park, and was named Groom of the Stole, Mistress of the Robes, and Keeper of the Privy Purse. Her daughters were nominated Ladies of the Bedchamber. Godolphin became Lord High Treasurer, and the Earl of Sunderland obtained a pension of £2000 per annum. It appeared that Anne had only wished to reign in order to distinguish with the highest marks of royal regard the family and kinsmen of her favourite.

But the temper of "Queen Sarah" did not improve with prosperity. Her haughtiness degenerated into insolence; her freedom partook of the nature of license; and she repeatedly outraged, not only the dignity of the Queen, but the feelings of the woman. At the Coronation, when holding the Queen's gloves, or offering them to her sovereign, it was observed that she turned away her head with a significant gesture, "as if she had an ill smell under her nose." She was not only Mrs. Freeman to poor Mrs. Morley, but a very arrogant, dictatorial, and brow-beating Mrs. Freeman. She loved to see Anne tremble under the rod. She despised her narrow intellect and timid

nature ; but her temper obscuring her sagacity, she did not foresee that, after a time, the possession of absolute power would strengthen even Anne's feeble character, and the sovereign would eventually avenge the insulted woman. But there were others who foresaw this, and profited by what they foresaw. Swift remarks that the alienation of the Queen from her haughty favourite dated from the moment of her accession. The moment that she begun to enjoy power, she longed to exercise it uncontrolled. The Countess might have preserved her influence to the last if she had understood Anne's character, and if her own haughty temper would have suffered her to flatter where she had formerly told unwelcome truths, become the sycophant where she had formerly been the imperious councillor. But she could not imagine that a time would come when Anne could dispense with the support of the Marlboroughs.

It is interesting to observe how, through all the stormy experiences of his political and military campaigns, and in spite of the violent temper and haughty disposition which no one saw more clearly than himself, Marlborough

preserved for his wife the passionate and forbearing love of his early manhood. This side of his character appears to have escaped the attention of his hostile critics, or in the contemplation of an affection so pure and elevated, their censures would surely have lost some of their malignant bitterness. On quitting England to undertake the campaign of 1702, he wrote to the Countess in the fond language of a devoted lover :—

“May 15th. It is impossible,” he says, “to express with what a heavy heart I parted with you when I was by the water’s side. I could have given my life to come back, though I knew my own weakness so much that I durst not, for I knew I should have exposed myself to the company. I did for a great while, with a perspective glass, look upon the cliffs, in hopes I might have had one sight of you. We are now out of sight of Margate, and I have neither soul nor spirits, but I do at this minute suffer so much that nothing but being with you can recompense it. If you will be sensible of what I now feel, you will endeavour ever to be easy to me, and then I shall be most happy ;

for it is you only that can give me true content. I pray God to make you and yours happy; and if I could contribute anything to it with the utmost hazard of my life, I should be glad to do it."

So, after the Battle of Blenheim, he writes:—

"August 14th. Before the battle was done yesterday, I writ to my dearest soul to let her know that I was well, and that God had blessed Her Majesty's arms with as great a victory as has ever been known; for prisoners I have the Marshal de Tallard, and the greatest part of his general officers, about 8,000 men, and 1,500 officers. . . . I am so very much out of order with having been seventeen hours on horseback yesterday, and not having been able to sleep above three hours last night, that I can write to none of my friends. However; I am so pleased with this action, that I can't end my letter without being so vain as to tell my dearest soul, that within the memory of man there has been no victory so great as this; and as I am sure you love me entirely well, you will be infinitely pleased with what has been done, upon

my account as well as the great benefit the public will have."

The prosperous career of Marlborough and his Countess received a sad check in the death of their only son, the Marquis of Blandford, a youth of great promise. While studying at Cambridge he was seized with an attack of small-pox; and it was soon discovered that the disease was of the most fatal type. The serene composure of Marlborough was not proof against this severe blow to his affection, his pride, and his hopes, and his letters to the Countess abundantly illustrate the poignancy of his affliction.

"Thursday, 9 in the morning. I have this minute received Mr. Godolphin's letter, and have sent to Mr. Hotto's, and do hope for what is desired, which this messenger will bring. I hope Dr. Haines and Dr. Coladon got to you early this morning. I am so troubled at the sad condition this poor child seems to be in, that I know not what I do. I pray God to give you some comfort in this great affliction. If you think anything under heaven can be done, pray let me know it, or

if you think my coming can be of the least use, let me know it. I beg I may hear as often as possible, for I have no thought but what is at Cambridge. Medicines are sent by the doctors. I shall be impatient to the last degree till I hear from you."

"Thursday night. I writ to you this morning, and was in hopes I should have heard again before this time, for I hope the doctors were with you early this morning. If we must be so unhappy as to lose this poor child, I pray God to enable us both to behave ourselves with that resignation which we ought to do. If this uneasiness which I now lie under should last long, I think I could not live. For God's sake, if there be any hope of recovery, let me know it."

A few hours after writing this letter Marlborough hurried to Cambridge, but arrived only in time to close the eyes of his beloved son, who died on the morning of Saturday, February 20th, 1703.

Her friend's affliction drew from the Queen some warm expressions of condolence.

"It would have been a great satisfaction,"

she wrote to the Duchess, "to your poor, unfortunate, faithful Morley, if you would have given me leave to come to St. Albans, for the unfortunate ought to come to the unfortunate. But since you will not have me, I must content myself as well as I can, till I have the happiness of seeing you here. I know nothing worth writing; but if I did, I should not trouble you with it, being sure no sort of news can be agreeable to your dear heavy heart. God Almighty bless and comfort my dear Mrs. Freeman, and be assured, I will live and die sincerely yours."

While Marlborough extended the glory of the British arms on the Continent, and baffled the efforts of the ablest commanders of France, his wife reigned at court the queen of fashion, and gathered around her all that English society then could boast of wit and genius, rank, wealth and beauty. The poets greeted her with adulatory rhymes; politicians could not weave their projects without her aid and countenance. Of her husband's power and influence she was the faithful guardian, and suffered not an opportunity to escape of increasing his

wealth or dignity: But of her duties at Court she grew weary; she loathed the honour, though unwilling to resign it to any other. She daily treated the Queen with greater petulance, and in public as well as private, delighted to exhibit her contempt. Anne began to feel that the bondage grew intolerable. She felt that she could reign without the Churchills, and yet habit rendered it difficult for her to break the chains she so long had worn. As Mrs. Freeman grew neglectful of Mrs. Morley, so Mrs. Morley became impatient of Mrs. Freeman. Over the sickening details of this back-stairs history we, however, are unwilling to linger; and shall content ourselves with placing before the reader only such salient details as will explain the abrupt termination of Queen Sarah's career of power.

She herself nourished the rival that worked her fall. Among the many kinswomen, whom her fame and success rescued from obscurity, was one Abigail Hill. She had procured for her the post of bed-chamber woman to the Princess Anne, which brought her into constant contact with her mistress, and enabled the

Countess to obtain, through her means, exact information of her movements and designs whenever she herself was absent from court. Of a dependant so humble, and apparently of such mediocre abilities, the haughty Sarah could feel no jealousy. She conceived her to be bound to her interests by the obligations of her gratitude and the ties of affinity, and congratulated herself on possessing so faithful and vigilant an observer of the transactions at court. To all her family she behaved with that careless generosity of which she was often capable, and raised most of its members to positions in which they were afterwards able to injure their benefactress greatly.

Abigail Hill, however, was fully capable of taking care of her own interests, and was one of those shrewd but despicable spirits who trade upon humility, and understand how to profit by their very meanness. In her constant intercourse with the Queen, she soon discovered with what unwillingness the yoke^e of the Marlborough was endured; and took care by her submissiveness and placidity to call Anne's attention to the contrast between her and that

haughty, arrogant Mrs. Freeman. By degrees she rose into the position of the Queen's confidant, participated in her secrets; soothed her sorrows; consoled her mortifications. Anne soon discovered that her bed-chamber woman's sympathies in politics and religion, were far more akin to her own than the Duchess of Marlborough's. Marlborough and Godolphin had gradually inclined towards the Whigs; Anne was favourable to the ultra Tories, breathed high church principles, and was not unjustly suspected of being herself a Jacobite at heart. She found in Mrs. Hill a zealous partisan and a devoted servant. From the loud-spoken and arrogant Duchess she turned, therefore, with a sigh of relief to this meek, gentle, humble woman, who was content to be a servant and a friend, to receive her sovereign's confidence and never presume upon it.

Yet it is certain that Anne and her new favourite would never have broken down the firm empire of the able and strong-willed Duchess, had not the plot been directed by a subtler mind and conducted to its issues by a keener intellect. Mrs. Hill, and the queen her-

self, were but the tools of Mr. Secretary Harley, who, though he owed his political consideration principally to the favour of Marlborough, and was ever loud in his professions of respect and attachment to the great general, never ceased to undermine his power and manœuvre for his overthrow. Harley was the very soul of intrigue, and would have had figured with conspicuous eminence even in the astute school of Spanish diplomacy. Place and power were the two objects of his ambition—for which he would betray a friend or secretly stab a foe—for which he was prepared to lie and fawn, dissemble and deceive. It may be doubted whether any English statesman cared so little for English interests as this dark and crafty intriguer. He betrayed Marlborough as he afterwards cheated Bolingbroke; and he played upon the Queen's Stuart-like jealousy of the prerogative, so as to get into his own hands such an amount of absolute power as no minister of England had ever before enjoyed.

The intrigue was conducted with so much art, that it was long before the keen eyes of the Duchess detected its danger. Her confidential

friends had remarked it, and remonstrated with her upon the rising influence of Mrs. Hill ; but Queen Sarah, confident in her own power, and well pleased to be released from the restraint of court-attendance, refused to attach any importance to it. At length, however, when too late, her eyes were opened. She discovered that Abigail, without her knowledge, had privately married Mr. Samuel Masham, a groom of Prince George's bed-chamber, and—what was worse—that Queen Anne had secretly attended the ceremony. Whenever she visited the Queen, she caught sight of Mrs. Masham's retiring figure. Her own requests were refused, and favours which she had solicited for her own dependants, conferred on Mrs. Masham's friends. The Duchess, as was her wont, grew very wroth. She assailed the Queen with reproaches, and accused her of suffering an humble confidante to underrate the duke's brilliant services, and prejudice her in favour of Jacobites and Tories. She urged these charges in violent conversation and equally violent letters. The Queen replied in a strain which is curiously unworthy of her exalted dignity. Take but one example :

“Friday, five o’clock, July 18th, 1707. I give my dear Mrs. Freeman many thanks for her letter, which I received this morning, as I must always do for everything that comes from her, not doubting but what you say is sincerely meant in kindness to me. But I have so often been unfortunate in what I have said to you, that I think the less I say to your last letter the better ; therefore, I shall only, in the first place, beg your pardon once more for what I said the other day, which I find you take ill, and say something in answer to your explanation of the suspicions you seemed to have concerning your cousin Hill, who is very far from being an occasion of feeding Mrs. Morley in her passion, as you are pleased to call it ; she never meddling with anything.

“I believe *others that have been in her station in former times have been tattling and very impertinent*, but she is not at all of that temper ; and as for the company she keeps, it is with her as with most other people. I fancy that their lot in the world makes them move with some, out of civility rather than choice ; and I really believe, for one that is so much in the

way of company, she has less acquaintances than any one on earth. I hope, since in some part of your letter you seem to give credit to a thing, because I said it was so, you will be as just in what I have said now about Hill; for I would not have any one hardly thought of by my dear Mrs. Freeman for your poor unfortunate, but ever faithful Morley's notions or actions."

This sarcastic epistle only added fuel to the fire. The Duchess now complained that Mrs. Masham, who was her kinswoman, and had received her favours, never paid her respects to her. The Queen replied that it was not unnatural Mrs. Masham should keep away while the Duchess cherished such feelings of anger. "My cousin," retorted the regal Sarah, "has no cause to be afraid, unless she is conscious of some crime." The Queen could only reply, "It is very natural, and she is very much in the right," repeating this assertion until the Duchess in her wrath retired suddenly from the royal presence, alarming the royal nerves by shutting the door violently as she made her exit.

The marches and countermarches of the allied armies—the stratagems and manœuvres of Marlborough and Eugene—sink into insignificance when compared with the internecine war that shook the walls of St. James's and startled the Majesty of England in her domestic retirement. The Duchess was not a foe to be conquered without many an ambuscade as well as pitched battle; and in defeat assumed so lofty a post and so dignified an air that it was very difficult to tell she had not won the victory. It must be owned that in this semi-tragic, semi-comic drama the queen played a very mean and contemptible part. She was a shuttlecock bandied to and fro by the skilful hands of Harley and the Duchess. Putting aside the lofty Sarah's violence, of temper and unbecoming arrogance, it cannot be denied that she acted her part with spirit, ability, and dignity. She was the wife of the great Marlborough—of the hero of Blenheim and Ramillies—and it was *his* honour she struggled to preserve. And if her overweening pride and his too great sense of the services he had rendered, led them to forget too often the

relations that ought to exist between a sovereign and a sovereign's most distinguished servant, it is not the less certain that the Queen treated him with an unqueenly ingratitude, and became with very little dignity the instrument of his bitterest enemies.

Soon after the victory of Oudenarde these continual altercations broke out into an open quarrel. The Duchess, as Mistress of the Robes, had arranged the jewels to be worn by the queen on the occasion of the public thanksgiving. Instigated probably by Mrs. Masham—to whom at least, the Duchess attributed the ill office—the Queen refused to adopt the arrangement; and was immediately reprimanded by Mrs. Freeman in a very open and emphatic manner. The Duchess continued her reproaches as they rode towards St. Paul's, and reverting to the subject during the service itself, endeavoured to enforce her remonstrances by introducing the name of the duke, who complained, she said, that he no longer enjoyed the usual amount of confidence and favour. As the Queen prepared to reply, the Duchess haughtily interrupted her to request that she would

cease the conversation lest they should be overheard.

Then ensued a war of acrimonious invective, followed by an interview in which the Duchess forgot every restraint of courtly etiquette. So vehement were her expostulations that her voice was heard in the ante-chamber, and after she had left, the Queen was found weeping.

Mrs. Freeman and Mrs Morley, after this *éclaircissement*, continued on good terms only in their correspondence, and this effected so little towards a better understanding that the duke wisely advised his obstinate and headstrong wife to refrain from it. "It has always been my observation in disputes," he wrote, "especially in that of kindness and friendship, that all reproaches, though ever so reasonable, do serve to no other end but the making the breach wider." Queen Sarah, however, could not consent to abandon the struggle without a further effort, and towards the close of the year 1709, obtained another interview with Her Majesty, of which she has left us a curious account.

She began by requesting the Queen to grant

some lodgings recently vacated in the palace of St. James's, for the purpose of forming a more commodious entry to her own apartments, claiming a former promise. Anne having reserved them for the use of Mrs Masham's sister was much embarrassed, and solemnly denied that she had ever given such a pledge. An altercation ensued, in which the Duchess repeated her assertion, and the Queen her contradiction. "But supposing," replied the Duchess, "that I am mistaken, surely my request cannot be deemed unreasonable." The Queen rejoining, "I have a great many servants of my own, and some of them I must remove;" the Duchess smiled and said, "Your Majesty then does not reckon Lord Marlborough or me among your servants?" And observing the Queen's evident hesitation, she continued, "Some of my friends having pressed me to wait oftener upon your Majesty, I have been compelled, in vindication of my conduct, to relate the usage I have received from your Majesty; and for this reason I have been under the necessity of repeating, and asserting the truth of what I said, before they

could be induced to believe it; and I believe it would be thought still more strange, were I to repeat this conversation, and inform them that after all Lord Marlborough's services, your Majesty refused to give him a miserable hole to make a clear entry to his lodgings: I beg, therefore, to know, whether I am at liberty to repeat this to any of my friends." After some delay, the Queen, with much disorder in her looks, replied in the affirmative. The Duchess, preparing to retire, added, "I hope your Majesty will reflect upon all that has passed," and receiving no response, she abruptly quitted the apartment.

Soon after this interview the pertinacious Mrs. Freeman again saw Mrs. Morley, though the old phrases of endearing familiarity had long been dropped, and solicited the queen to inform her what crime she had committed to have earned so great an alteration in her Majesty's behaviour. Anne replied in a letter, in which she spoke with bitterness of her hatred of Mrs. Masham, and the Duchess's desire to deprive her of the royal favour. She added significantly, "It is impossible for you to

recover my former kindness, but I shall behave myself to you as the Duke of Marlborough's wife and as my Groom of the Stole."

Not content with this decisive intimation, the Duchess employed herself in drawing up a copious narrative of the commencement and progress of the friendship between Mrs Morley and Mrs. Freeman, which she intermingled with extracts from "The Whole Duty of Man" on "Friendship," and from those introductory remarks prefixed to the Communion Service, that enjoin upon us not to partake of the Lord's Supper unless we are at peace and in charity with all mankind. To this was added a similar passage from Bishop Taylor. Neither the narrative, nor its illustrative moralities, were acknowledged by the Queen. The Duchess relates with apparent astonishment, that they had no effect upon her Majesty, "except," she adds, "that after my coming to town, as she was passing by me in order to receive the Communion, she looked with much good-nature, and very graciously smiled upon me. But the smile and pleasant look, I had reason afterwards to think, were given to Bishop

Taylor and the Common Prayer-Book, and not to me."

The final dismissal of the Duchess, however, did not take place until January, 1711, when the Queen wholly abandoned the Whig party, and gave herself up heart and soul to the Tories. The Duchess was then dismissed from all her employments, and required to give up her apartments at St. James.' The hero of Blenheim condescended to request that his wife might be spared so public an humiliation, but not even his great services could prevent the vulgar nature of Anne from enjoying the scandal of her former favourite's disgrace. It is a very pitiful chapter in English history, this government of a great nation from the Queen's closet and the back-stairs; and shows clearly enough, were any such illustration needful, that the sovereign who first compromises his dignity by loading favours on his confidant will end with gratifying his resentment at the expense of his honour.

Behold Queen Sarah, though disgraced and discarded, still a power in the State. She headed the battles of the Whig Opposition, as

far as they could be fought in the *salon* and the drawing-room, with extraordinary vigour and decision. Neither her pen nor her tongue was idle. In vain Swift attacked her with all the malevolence of his bad heart and great brain :—

“ A widow kept a favourite cat,
At first a gentle creature ;
But when he was grown sleek and fat,
With many a mouse and many a rat,
He soon disclosed his nature.”

But the Duchess was of too brave a spirit to be silenced by the wit of any Tory satirist in the “*Examiner*,” however fatal it might prove to the influence and character of her husband. Her mien was as stately, and her brow as smooth, as in the days when Abigail—now Lady Masham—besought her favour with “*’bated breath*,” and Mrs. Morley lavished her love and familiarity upon Mrs. Freeman.

The triumph of Harley and his party was quickly followed by the dismissal of Marlborough, who retired in calm dignity to the Continent to receive from Holland and Ger-

many the praise and gratitude denied him by the dominant faction in his own country. On the accession of George I., the Whigs again returned to power, and Marlborough, on his entrance into the metropolis (August 4th, 1714), was received by the people with a welcome which sensibly affected him. The king restored him to his offices of Captain-General of the Army and Master of the Ordnance, in which capacity he provided for the defence of the country when the Scotch rebellion broke out in 1715. But this was his last public service. The death of his daughter Elizabeth, in March, 1714, when only twenty-six years of age, and of his beloved Anne, the "Little Whig," in April, 1716, at the early age of twenty-nine, were blows which not even his vigorous intellect could endure unshaken, from the very fervency of his domestic affections. Soon after the latter event he was seized with an attack of palsy (May 28th), from which he partially recovered. On the 10th of the following November a second and severer attack caused great alarm to his family and friends, but he still struggled on, retaining his memory and

understanding little impaired. He made his last appearance in the House of Lords on the 27th of November, 1721. In the following May he was again attacked with a violent paroxysm of his paralytic disorder, which, it soon became evident, must prove fatal. His wife remained a faithful attendant by his bedside to the last, and it was in her arms that the hero of so many victories drew his latest breath, at four o'clock in the morning, on the 16th of June, 1722.

Thus, at the age of sixty-two, was Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, left a widow. Her income was not less than forty thousand pounds per annum ; her personal charms were still considerable ; her mind shone as bright and vivacious as in the summer of her days. It is, therefore, not surprising that a suitor for her hand soon made his appearance in a Whig nobleman, Lord Coningsby. He was quietly refused ; and Charles, Duke of Somerset, the "proud Duke," next presented himself, with no very great appearance of humility, we may be sure. Her reply was remarkable for simple dignity :

"The widow of Marlborough," she said,

“shall never become the wife of any other man.”

She cherished to the last her affectionate reverence for the memory of her ‘great husband. The Duchess of Buckingham, when her husband died, wished to borrow the funeral car that had conveyed the remains of the famous warrior to his tomb at Blenheim.

“It carried my lord of Marlborough,” exclaimed the Duchess, “and shall never carry any other.”

But it is not essential to our exposition of her character to dwell upon the incidents of her old age. How she quarrelled with her grandson, the second Duke of Marlborough; how she made a puppet-show of waxwork in ridicule of his wife and his wife’s eight cousins; how she maintained a brilliant war with Sir Robert Walpole; how she loved to pour out the fierce affections of her passionate heart on Diana and John Spencer; how she litigated with Vanbrugh; how she published her memoirs;* and how, on one occasion, when Child’s

* Nathaniel Hooke, the historian of Rome, prepared these Memoirs for the press. She rewarded him with a gratuity of £4,000.

Bank was nearly ruined in a quarrel with the Bank of England, she drew a cheque in its favour for one hundred thousand pounds, are incidents interesting in themselves, but unnecessary as illustrations of her peculiar disposition. For old age aggravates the harshnesses of a bold frank character, and sharpens those angularities which, in the general roundness of the outline of youth, were scarcely perceptible. We have said enough, we think, to show what manner of woman she was—this imperious, impulsive, daring, haughty, and withal generous Queen Sarah who ruled, with so arbitrary a sway, the world of English fashion for so many years. Her mental powers were considerable. She was not without a remarkable fascination of manner. In a licentious time she preserved her wifely fame pure and unsullied. But her affections, like her hates, were violent; and even her deep love for her serene and tranquil husband had in it not a little of the vehemence of a Xantippe. She could not forgive, we fear; her resentments went with her down to that cold and silent grave where love and hate equally mingle with the dust. There were no

tame compromises in Sarah of Marlborough's disposition. Her character, like Strafford's policy, was all—*thorough*.*

The Duchess died in 1744, aged sixty-four.

“Old Marlborough is dying,” writes Horace Walpole, “but who can tell? Last year she had lain a great while ill without speaking : her physician said she must be blistered, or she would die ; she called out, ‘I won’t be blistered and I won’t die !’ ”

But death will not always be denied, and it came at last to “Queen Sarah,” as to queens less worthy—and more worthy—of crown or coronet than she was.

* The reader who wishes to know more of the character of this remarkable woman, of its acuteness, vivacity, and shrewdness, is recommended to peruse an agreeable paper in the elder D’Israeli’s “Curiosities of Literature,” entitled “Secret History of the Building of Blenheim.” She is there spoken of as Pope’s “Atossa ;” but we believe it is now generally admitted that it was the Duchess of Buckinghamshire whom the poet dissected in that merciless piece of moral anatomy.

*Authorities :—*Coxe’s Life of the Duke of Marl-

borough; Mrs. Thomson's Life of the Duchess of Marlborough; Walpole's Correspondence; Boyer's History of the Reign of Queen Anne; Memoirs of the Duchess, by herself, (ed. by Hooke); Burnet's History of His Own Time; Colley Cibber's Apology; Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu; Swift's Works, &c., &c.

AGNES SOREL.

A.D. 1409—1450.

AGNES SOREL.

“ Une beauté nommée Agnes Sorel ;
Jamais l’amour ne forma rien de tel,
Imaginez de Flore la jeunesse,
La taille et l’air de la nymphe des bois,
Et de Vénus la grâce enchanteresse,
Et de l’Amour le séduisant minois :
L’art d’Arachné, le doux chant des Syrènes,
Elle avait tout ; elle aurait dans ses chaînes
Mis les héros, les sages, et les rois.”

VOLTAIRE. *La Pucelle.*

(Translated.)

Agnes Sorel was the bright lady’s name,
And never Love had form’d so fair a dame.
Think but of Flora’s youth—the wood-nymph’s mien
And slender figure—of the grace serene
Of all enchanting Venus—Cupid’s spell,
Arachne’s art, the Syren’s sweetest strains,—
All these were hers. So, fetter’d in her chains,
Heroes, and kings, and sages gladly fell.

THIS agreeable portrait of the heroine who
divides with Joan of Arc the love and gratitude

of France, the reader may wish to compare with the more luscious description drawn by Chape-
lain :—

“ Les glaces lui font voir un front pur et modeste
Sur qui vers chaque tempe à bouillons séparés
Trouvent les riches flots de ses cheveux dorés :
Sous lui roulent deux yeux dont les ardentes flammes
Mille foudres sans bruit s’élancent dans les âmes.
Deux yeux étincelants qui, pour être sereins,
N’en font pas moins trembler les plus hardis humains.
Au-dessous se fait voir en chaque jour éclore
Sur un fond de lys blanc une vermeille rose,
Plus bas s’offre et s’avance une bouche enfantine
Qu’une petite fosse à chaque angle termine,
Et dont les petits bords faits d’un corail brillant
Couvrent deux blancs filets de perles d’Orient.
On voit que sous son col un double demi-globe
Se hausse par mesure et soulève sa robe,
L’un et l’autre d’un blanc si pur et si parfait
Qu’il ternit la blancheur de la neige et du lait.”

(Translated.)

A pure and modest brow the glass shows to her ardent
gaze,
A brow, where o’er each temple white, the swelling
tress displays
The golden glory of her hair, and underneath it shine
Two eyes, whose noiseless lightning smites the soul
with awe divine,

And even when those sparkling orbs melt in a calm
serene,

They may not by the boldest be with heart unshaken
seen :

Lo, too, the mirror fond reveals each cheek where rosy
red.

Is o'er the lily's snowy white in soft sweet lustre spread,
The pouting mouth, in dimples rich, whose lips of coral
curl

Over two whitely-gleaming rows of Oriental pearl,
And low beneath the taper neck, a double hemisphere
That gently rises, gently falls, and stirs the bosom gear,
Each swelling globe of white so pure, so dazzling in its
sheen,

That purest milk and Alpine snow are put to shame, I
ween.

On the death of Henry V. in 1422, his infant son, Henry VI. was proclaimed King of England and France, in the two capitals—London and Paris—and it seemed as if the subjugation of France by the valiant islanders was now complete. The true heir of Charles VI., sunk in voluptuous indolence, made no effort to regain the kingdom of his forefathers, and the war which was still maintained against the English in various provinces was neither guided nor inspired by him who ought to have

been its leader. France itself was divided into two factions, of whom the Armagnacs espoused the cause of Henry VI., and the royalists struggled with little heart or hope against the ever increasing torrent of English ascendancy. Guided by the political genius and military ability of the Duke of Bedford—the king's uncle, and his Regent in France—the English proceeded steadily and surely, from victory to victory, capturing town after town, defeating the French and their allies, the Scotch, on the glorious fields of Crevant and Verneuil, (July 1st, 1423, August 17th, 1424,) breaking up the royal army into detached bands of marauders, who were easily surrounded and destroyed in detail, and gradually establishing the authority of Henry VI. over the whole of France that lay north of the Loire.

The rapid progress of the English arms was facilitated by two great events: the assassination of the Duke of Burgundy at the Bridge of Montereau, under the eyes and with the tacit consent of Charles VII., which forced the Burgundians into a close alliance with England; and the temper and character of the French

monarch, which, as we have hinted, were neither calculated to animate the spirit nor keep alive the loyalty of his subjects.

At this crisis, when it seemed probable that France would become a dependency of England, there arose a remarkable woman, the daughter of a peasant of Lorraine, who believing herself specially marked out by Heaven for the glorious task of chastising her country's enemies, communicated a surprising enthusiasm to her comrades, led them to the fight, relieved Orléans from the English leaguer, crowned Charles VII. at Rheims with the sacred oil, and checked the flow of English conquest when it appeared most irresistible. After a brief career she was taken prisoner, tried by prejudiced and suborned judges on the charge of sorcery, and burned to death at Rouen on the 30th of May, 1431.

The military achievements of this wonderful heroine—one of the purest and most interesting characters in the history of the Middle Ages—were of no great importance, but the impulse she lent to the decaying patriotism of her countrymen was of the highest value to the cause of Charles VII. Joan of Arc, however,

had appealed to the people, and it was the people that responded; the king still remained unmoved, the tool of his favourites, the sport of his courtesans, and wanting the spirit and resolution to strike one blow for his crown. This *Roitelet de Bourges* cared only for the wine cup and *les filles d'amour*. Not for his people, but for him was an inspiration needed, and this inspiration was also a woman's noble work. It was the work of Agnes Sorel.

Yes; however historians may seek to diminish, or explain away the incident, it is certain that the sudden awakening of Charles VII. from his voluptuous lethargy was largely due to the influence of "the lady of beauty;" and the quatrain which Francis I. inscribed beneath her portrait did but express the sentiment of all France.

"Gentille Agnès, plus d'honneur tu mérites
La cause étant de France recouvrir,
Que ce que peut dedans un cloître ouvrir
Chose nonain ou bien dévot hermite."

The anecdote told by Brantôme, in his *Femmes Galantes*, is not, indeed, authentic; chronology sternly disproves it. It is one of

those stories, nevertheless, which everybody wishes to be true. "The beautiful Agnes," says the chronicler, "perceiving that the king, Charles VII., was enamoured of her, and that, enervated and a coward, he cared only to whisper love to her, and made no account of his kingdom, told him one day that when she was yet a young girl, an astrologer had predicted to her that she should be loved and protected by one of the most valiant and courageous kings in Christendom. That when the king honoured her with his love, she thought he was the valorous monarch of whom she had been foretold; but seeing him so soft, with so little care for his business, she now knew that she was mistaken, and that the king so courageous was not he, but the king of England, who did such fine feats of arms, and took so many beautiful towns under his very eyes (*à sa barbe*). 'Therefore,' she said, 'I shall go and seek him out, for it is he whom the astrologer intended.' These words so sharply pricked the king's heart that he began to weep, and thenceforward, taking courage and abandoning his hunting grounds and gardens, he seized the bit with his

teeth; so that by his fortune and valour he drove the English from his kingdom."

As Sismondi remarks,* this story evidently alludes to Henry V., as the king whose renown for valour had extended over all Christendom. But Agnes Sorel was only twelve years old when the hero of Agincourt died. To Henry VI. the astrologer's prediction could not apply, for he was not only of a peaceful and timorous character, but scarcely ten years old when Agnes Sorel was first introduced to Charles VII. This event is usually considered to have occurred in 1431, though some authorities place it in 1427, before the siege of Orléans and the advent of Joan of Arc. The transformation of Charles VII. from an indolent voluptuary to a brave and active king took place in 1439, and, therefore, at first sight it seems difficult to connect Agnes Sorel with it.

But there are other objections to the usually received legend of this famous beauty which it is necessary to notice. Agnes Sorel died (in

* See also Hallam, "History of the Middle Ages," I., 81. Sismondi, XIII., 346.

childbed) in 1450, and Monstrelet says that she had been about five years in the service of the queen; and that the king appreciating her wit and vivacity, it was generally reported that he had made her his mistress. Oliver de la Marche, another contemporary, who lived in the court of Burgundy about 1444, says that the king had recently raised a poor damsel, a gentlewoman, named Agnes Sorel, and endowed her with such splendour and such power, that her condition might be compared to the great princesses of the kingdom; and "certes," he says, "she was one of the handsomest women I ever saw, and did, in her position, good service to the kingdom of France. She brought to the king's notice young men of arms and gentle companions (of the sword), by whom he was afterwards well served." Du Clerc, writing about the same time, says that Agnes died of poison, very young.

"It is for the reader to judge," says Hallam, "how far these passages render it improbable that Agnes Sorel was the mistress of Charles VII. at the siege of Orléans in 1428, and, consequently, whether she is entitled to the

praise which she has received, of being instrumental in the deliverance of France. The tradition, however, is as ancient as Francis I., who made in her honour a quatrain which is well-known. This probably may have brought the story more into vogue, and led Mezeray, who was not very critical, to insert it in his history, from which it has passed to his followers. Its origin was apparently the popular character of Agnes. She was the Nell Gwynne of France, and justly beloved, not only for her charity and courtesy, but for bringing forward men of merit and turning her influence, a virtue very rare in her class, towards the public interest."

It is with the utmost diffidence that we venture to differ with a writer so able, so learned, and impartial as Mr. Hallam. But it appears to us that the scant justice he does to the merits of Agnes Sorel is owing to the exaggerated view he takes of the services of Joan of Arc. We would not underrate the importance of the work achieved by the latter heroine; but in reality the position of the English in France was, in a military point of

view, as firm after her death at Rouen as before she broke the leaguer of Orléans. What Joan of Arc accomplished was, the revival of the drooping spirit^s and waning patriotism of her countrymen by her appeal to their superstition and enthusiasm. Her purity, her simplicity, her humble origin detracted from her influence with the king. She made no impression on his mind or heart. He suffered her to perish in the flames kindled by fanaticism and national rivalry, without an effort to rescue the maid who had crowned him King of France. He was still, after her death as before it, a sluggard and a *débauché*. It was reserved for the commanding beauty and more powerful mind of Agnes Sorel to rouse him from his shameful indolence and to provide the newly excited energies of France with their legitimate leader. Her mission was the development of the mission of the Virgin Warrior ; the one awoke the commonalty of France, the other its king and chivalry ; and the names of Joan of Arc and Agnes Sorel may, therefore, be fitly connected with the events, which, if glorious for their own country were also eminently fortunate for England.

In despite of the authorities adduced by Mr. Hallam, we believe that the introduction of Agnes Sorel to the court of Charles VII. took place at an earlier date than he allows. Monstrelet's statement only shows that she had been a certain time in the queen's service, not that she had been but five years at court. Oliver de la Marche says, in 1444, that Charles had *recently* (*nouvellements*) raised her to triumph and power; but the old chroniclers wrote very loosely about time and dates; and, moreover, it is certain that the king had received her into his favour long before he distinguished her with public honours.

A powerful agent in the deliverance of France was the Duke of Burgundy's desertion of the English alliance. This alliance, which "had been only the fruit of indignation at his father's murder, fell naturally, as that passion wore out, into sentiments more congenial to his birth and interests." The union of his sister with the Duke of Bedford, and the favour shown by Charles VII. to his father's murderers, kept him faithful to the English for many years, although rendering them less and

less assistance ; but the death of Bedford loosened the last tie, and Richemont's expulsion of the royal favourites from court satisfied his desire of vengeance.

A negotiation had been opened with Philip le Hardi, through the intervention of the Duchess of Lorraine and Bar, Queen of Sicily, a woman of an active mind and far-seeing intellect. Agnes Sorel, her maid of honour, was the devoted intermediary, (says Capefigue,) and, so to speak, the hostage given to the king. The labour was difficult and delicate, for the duke and the king had much to forgive and forget ; but Charles granted all the duke could ask, and at length the gallant soldiers of Burgundy were ranged on the side of France against their old allies the English. The treaty of Arras which concluded the long revolt of the Duke of Burgundy was signed on the 21st of September, 1435.

From this epoch may be dated the gradual awakening of Charles VII. to a sense of his duties and responsibilities as sovereign of a land that was struggling against foreign oppression ; and it is impossible not to connect with it the

operation of the influence of Agnes Sorel. The king first took the field in July 1437, when he assembled an army at Gien, of six or seven thousand men, and undertook the siege of Montreâu. The siege lasted six weeks. "The king himself," says Monstrelet, "in his own person underwent much labour;" and other writers bear testimony to the brilliant valour he displayed. Thenceforward he worked for the deliverance of his kingdom with astonishing vigour, resolution, and ability. Thenceforward he showed a determination to re-establish order, to subdue his enemies, to sacrifice his repose and pleasures to his duty, and a remarkable ability in the choice of means to arrive at ends so desirable.

Money is the sinews of war, and it is possible that Charles VII. might have entered the field at an earlier date if he had been provided with the needful resources. He could not now have accomplished his task had not a man who was at once wealthy and patriotic, and whose name ought to share the gratitude of France with those of her two heroines, come to his aid with a noble liberality. The life and times of Jacques

Cœur have been rendered familiar to the English reader by Miss Costello's interesting and elaborate volumes. He was a rich merchant of Bourges, the king's goldsmith, and the son of a goldsmith.

Now, at that epoch, a goldsmith was not only an artisan, but an artist; not only a workman, but a merchant. He coined money, assayed and purified the precious metals, fabricated vessels and sculptures in gold and silver, lent money at exorbitant usance, was the banker of the state, and his shop the mart of exchange of nations. Jacques Cœur was profoundly versed in the science of metals. He had a clear intellect and a cool judgment. By degrees his operations became very extensive, and radiated from Bourges over all that was then known of the civilized world. At Constantinople and Venice, where gold was pure, he bought large quantities of coin; flung them into his melting-pot, and re-issued them in a coinage for France of less purity; but still far superior to the previous currency. Thus he served the public weal while he increased his private fortune; and as his heart was generous, and his hand ever

open, his immense wealth was not regarded with jealousy.

Jacques Cœur was named "Master of the Mint." He afterwards received the official title of "Treasurer to the King," and undertook the entire control of the finances. Protected by the Duchess of Lorraine, the friend and devoted servant of Agnes Sorel, a loyal subject and an earnest patriot, he set himself to work to develop the resources of the kingdom. On his own credit he obtained loans from the bankers of Milan, Venice, and Genoa. He fixed a legal value upon money; settled the imposition of certain regular taxes; and having provided himself with the necessary means, called together the bands of guerillas scattered over France, united them into one body, and secured their discipline and obedience by regular pay for themselves and their leaders.

The influence of Agnes Sorel over Charles VII. was no longer a secret. Happily for France it was always exercised for noble ends. At the voice of the romantic beauty, the French chivalry arose and gathered round their king. She still retained her modest position as maid of

honour to the Queen of Sicily, but as the king's mistress her power was irresistible. Possessing, like all clever women, a quick eye for manly merit, she brought forward the young and energetic scions of the nobility of France, who attached themselves to the king with a passion of generous loyalty, unknown to the aged knights whose heads had grown grey in intrigues and struggles for the supremacy among themselves. There are extant some letters which show the almost regal style adopted by the powerful beauty, and it is pleasant to find them breathe a very gentle and womanly feeling.

Thus, she writes to the magistrate of Chesnaye-en-Bois :

“Monsieur le Prévôt, I have heard and understood that some men of Chesnaye have been confined by you on suspicion of having taken some wood from the forest of Chesnaye. Whereupon, having been told that the said men are poor and wretched persons, I wish, Monsieur le Prévôt, that the said process be not carried any further. By attending to this without delay, you will please your good mistress,

“AGNES.”

To Mademoiselle de Bonneville, "my good friend:"

"Mademoiselle, my good friend,—I commend myself heartily to you. Pray you to be kind enough to give to the bearer Christopher my grey gown lined with white, and all the pairs of gloves which you can find in my house ; the said Christopher having lost my trunk (*mon coffret*). You will please, moreover, to receive my greyhound, 'Carpet,'* whom you will be good enough to carefully tend, and not let him go to the hunt with any one, for he neither obeys whistle nor call, and might be lost, which would trouble me greatly, and having com-

* Apropos of Agnes Sorel's greyhound, Monsieur Capefigue indulges in a graceful allusion to the past :

"For the ladies of the castle the pack of hounds was almost like a family ; the chase was the pre-occupation of feudal life, of women especially, who all faced boldly the stag and the wild boar. It is not said that they ever turned back. They knew the names of pointers, bloodhounds, coursers. What animal so fickle as the greyhound, without the instinct of scent and without attachment ! Nevertheless, it was pre-eminently the feudal dog ; men reproduced it upon their coats-of-

mended him to you, my good friend, would not please me. Praying God that he will keep you in his grace. etc.

“AGNES.”

The great influence which Agnes Sorel* enjoyed with Charles VII. was owing as much to her daring spirit, her lofty thoughts, and her brilliant conversation, as to her surpassing personal beauty. Her bright and powerful mind commanded the lighter intellect and more fickle brain of the king; and inspired him in many of the most critical moments of his troubled

arms; they sculptured it at the feet of the chatelain upon her tomb; a graceful companion, it never quitted its mistress; lithe, well-set, it followed its lady's palfrey even into the thick woods, into the dense coppice, to the joust, where, upon the great red scaffolds, it couched at her feet; it bore her initials on its enamelled collar, on the caparison which covered it in the depths of winter. Noble time of chivalry, what hast thou become, since all history was a flourish of trumpets! Life was then spent between the legend, the manor, the hunt, the battue—the only emotions which create great souls!”—*Les Reines de la Main Gauche: Agnes Sorel, par M. Capéfigue.*

career. "His love for her," says Jean Chartier, "was for her youthful levities, her sports, her gaieties, her honourable and polished language, and also because among the beauties of the court she was the youngest and the most beautiful. She was, moreover, esteemed because she was of a very charitable life, liberal and large in her alms, distributing freely of her wealth to the poor of the church." She thus became the inspiration of the gay chivalry of France, and the muse that whispered of high and holy deeds to its king; nor did she ever cease to stimulate him to the admirable enterprise of rescuing his kingdom from a foreign yoke, even amidst the splendid festivities of Bourges and Chinon.

The progress of the French arms was brilliant during the year 1437, and the English were expelled from Melun and Fontainebleau, Bagnolet and Pantin, and finally from the city of Paris, which had been so long devoted to their cause. The king's advisers urged upon him the advantage to be derived from his presence in the capital, and thither accordingly he repaired. On the 12th of November, he slept

in the abbey of Saint Denis, and on the morrow was met by the magistrates and chief men of Paris, who conducted him through the city with the same pomp and ceremony that had welcomed Henry VI. seven years before. The return of the king was resplendent with beauty, youth, and valour ; but besides Charles VI. the spectators had eyes for none but his lovely mistress. There were still enemies of the king in Paris, and many murmurs rose against the beautiful Agnes, whom the Bishop of Thérrouine had contumaciously designated “ the new Herodias ” and “ the beast of the Apocalypse.” When she was informed of these things, she exclaimed with transient anger, “ These Parisians are but villains ; had I known they would have paid me so little honour, I would never have set foot in their city.” It was not, however, against the woman that they murmured, but against the costly splendour and luxurious folly of which they chose to consider her the type.

It was at this time that Charles VII. bestowed upon his favourite the pleasant manor and castle of Beauté-sur-Marne, whence she was afterwards called *la Dame de Beauté*—a

flattering cognomen that was peculiarly appropriate to her personal charms.

"To the Château de Beauté," says Capéfigue, "Charles VII. often repaired to rekindle his courage in the midst of the sorrows and discouragements of his restoration. The king held Paris; but the English were still masters of Normandy, Guienne, and all Gascony. At ten leagues from Paris, the standard of the leopard displayed itself all rampant with pride, and Pontoise was the main rendezvous of the English. A terrible disorder reigned in the armies of Charles VII. A further source of trouble was the riots of the Jacquerie—a tumultuous outbreak of peasants and serfs; while the chiefs of the great companies aspired to resume their ancient supremacy in the council of Charles VII. It was Agnes Sorel who now restored to the king all his energy. As the taxes yielded a scanty return, and the States-General, convened at Orléans, would grant no money but upon severe conditions, Agnes Sorel engaged her friend Jacques Cœur to make some heavy advances, even to ten millions of crowns, to recover Normandy by force of arms.

“The definitive triumph of the king in the war depended upon the capture of Pontoise, occupied by the English under the heroic Talbot. The king was surrounded by the flower of his chivalry, Saint Paul, La Hire, Xaintrailles, and Chabannes himself. Agnes Sorel repaired to his tent to rouse his enterprise and maintain his resolution. The siege lasted a long time, and like the Homeric heroes, the beleaguered and beleaguers insulted each other alternately; the English sang against the French army every kind of raillery :

“Vous contrefaites les vaillans
Il semble qu’avez tout conquis ;
Vous vous dites bons bataillans
Dès l’heure que futes naquis.
Bien paraît qu’être fortoureux,
Oncques ne futes si heureux
De nous venir aux champs combattre,
Grand orgueil est bon à rabattre.

(You would-be warriors, it seems you have conquered everything; you called yourselves gallant soldiers as soon as you were born. Truly it seems that you were very timorous, since you never dared to meet us in the open field! Such pride as yours deserves defeat.)

“To these insolent words the French replied :

“Votre grand orgueil rabattons
Et bien la peau vous fourbirons
A la venue du Duc d'York.
Tous les natifs de Normandie
Qui ont votre parti tenu
Sont traîtres, je n'en doute mie,
Autant le grand que le menu.”

(Your great pride we will humble, and thrash your hides in the sight of the Duke of York. All the men of Normandy who have taken your part are traitors, I do not doubt it, as well the great as the mean.)

“During the siege of Pontoise were enacted the finest, the noblest scenes of chivalry,—battles, body to body, with lance, with sword, *à la masse d'arme* ; chivalry ennobling the most pitiless strokes of war !”

In the splendour of Agnes Sorel's triumphant life, there was, nevertheless, one dark and heavy cloud ; the persistent hate of the Dauphin, afterwards the subtle and merciless Louis XI. It arose in some measure from political causes, and partly from the affection which had existed

between her and Margaret of Scotland, the Dauphin's wife, whom he cruelly suspected of infidelity ; and partly from the indignation with which he professed to behold the preference publicly accorded by the king to the mistress, and the coldness shown to his mother. But did this filial devotion spring from a pure motive, or was it the expression of his hatred for her who firmly repressed the revolts contrived by the intrigues of his criminal ambition ? In one of his fits of passion he even ventured to insult the Lady of Beauty with a blow. She immediately retired from court, and took up her residence in the royal Château of Loches, in Touraine. A powerful party was formed against her, and ceasing to take any active share in the direction of public affairs, she spent her latter days either at Loches, or in the sweet retirement of her Castle of Beauté sur la Marne.

Her career had been brilliant ; it was fated to be brief. • Charles VII. was staying at the Abbey of Jumièges, early in the year 1449, and Agnes had repaired to the neighbouring grange, La Ferme du Mesnil, when she was seized

with an illness, so sudden that it suggested to her contemporaries, the operation of poison, and at a later period, when Jacques Cœur met with the usual fate of illustrious patriots, he was accused of the crime. Throughout the famous beauty's life he had been her constant friend; after her death he became, by her desire, her testamentary executor. It was improbable, therefore, that he should be guilty of so foul a deed—a deed, moreover, by which he could profit nothing, but only deprive himself of a powerful protector.

The last scene in Agnes Sorel's brief drama of life is thus described by the mediæval chronicler, Jean Chartier :

“The public talk of her bad example and the general evil-speaking having come to the knowledge of Agnes, who was surnamed the Lady of Beauty, she fell, through the sorrow and displeasure it caused her, into a deep contrition and repentance of her sins. She bethought herself of Mary Magdalene, who was also a great sinner. Being taken ill, she invoked God and the Virgin Mary to her aid. Then, like a good Catholic, after having received the sacraments,

she asked for her 'Book of Hours' to read the verses of St. Bernard which she had written therein, and appointed as her testamentary executors, that noble man Jacques Cœur, Robert Félicien, the queen's physician, and Master Stephen Chevalier, the king's secretary and treasurer. She ordained that the king, alone and for all, should be above these three. The said Agnes told all her maidens that our human weakness was an odious and unsavoury thing, and uttered her regrets to Master Denis, her confessor, who wished to absolve her; when, after she had given very loud cries, calling upon and invoking the blessed Virgin Mary, her soul separated itself from her body, on Monday, the 11th day of February, 1449, at six o'clock in the evening. Her body was then opened and her heart removed to the Abbey of Jumièges; as for that which remained of the body, it was buried at Loches, with honourable pomp in the Collegiate Church of Notre Dame, where she had made many foundations and donations. God have mercy on her soul. Amen." The real cause of her death was a malady incident to pregnancy.

A monument was raised to her memory in the Church of Loches by the generous care of Jacques Cœur, and inscribed with this legend :

“ Oh ! Death, always inflexible, thou hast snatched from life so beautiful a creature in her youngest years ! ”

Alas ! this beauty covers a multitude of sins. In the case of Agnes Sorel it has tended, combined with patriotism, to blind historians to the profligacy of her manners and the costly splendours of her luxurious state. We blame the sin, but we pardon the sinner.

Monsieur Capefigue remarks that her name was employed to arouse the patriotism of France against the allied armies in 1814—a singular testimony to the enduring nature of her renown ; and the following strains resounded under the standards of Napoleon as, nearly four hundred years before, rude ballads in her honour had doubtless been trolled around the watch-fires of the chivalry of Charles VII. •

“ Il faut partir, Agnès l'ordonne,
Adieu repos, plaisir, adieu ;
J'aurai pour venger ma couronne,
Mes lauriers, l'amour, et mon Dieu.

Français, que le nom de ma belle,
 Dans leurs rangs porte la terreur ;
 J'oubliais la gloire auprès d'elle,
 Agnès me rend tout à l'honneur !"

Authorities :—Michelet, Histoire de France ; Barante, Histoire des Ducs de Bourgogne ; Mezerai ; Chronique de Jean Chartier ; Hallam's History of the Middle Ages ; Sismondi, Histoire des Français ; Capefigue, Agnes Sorel, &c.

MADAME RÉCAMIER.

A.D. 1777—1849.

MADAME RÉCAMIER.

It may be interesting to the reader to study the character of a woman, impossible, perhaps, in England, but the type of a numerous and important class in French society.

The wife of a respectable notary of Lyons, named Monsieur Bernard, gave birth, on the 4th of December, 1777, to a female child, who was thereupon baptized as Jeanne Françoise Julie Adelaide.

Seven years later, Monsieur Bernard had the good fortune to propitiate M. de Calonne, then minister of Louis XVI., who promoted him to the lucrative post of *Receveur de Finances*.

The promotion necessitated his removal to Paris, where his wife shone as a beauty and made money as a stock-jobber, but the youthful Julie remained until she was ten years old at the Convent of La Déserte at Lyons. On re-joining her family, both her mother, and her father were charmed with her childish grace and evident promise of remarkable loveliness. She therefore attended Madame Bernard at the toilette; was attired with sumptuous elegance; and, like an exotic flower, introduced into the hot-bed of fashionable society. The *littérateurs* who frequented her father's house, amused themselves with the pertness of the young beauty, and her personal attractions, it is said, were observed by Marie Antoinette, who sent for her to be measured with her daughter, then a child of nearly the same age.

At the early age of fifteen, the lovely Julie was married. The husband selected by her parents was a wealthy 'banker, Monsieur Récamier, a handsome man 'of forty-three (April, 1793). Scandal reported that she was, in reality, his daughter, and that the matrimonial connection only disguised the paternal relation-

ship. Even then, the affair would be sufficiently disgusting. It appears certain that he behaved to her as a father, and, perhaps, he adopted the marriage as the best expedient, in those troublous times, for securing to her the transmission of his wealth.

It was then the reign of terror, and the streets of Paris daily flowed with the blood of the good and brave, the wise and beautiful. To be rich was almost a certain passport to the guillotine. To lead a blameless life, was to incur the fatal suspicion of being an aristocrat. Monsieur Récamier went every day to behold the sacrifices offered up at the bloody shrine of liberty. He may have had, like George Selwyn, a taste for these terrible spectacles ; but when, thirty years afterwards, he was asked what had induced him to become an observer of them, he replied, " I daily expected to share the same fate, and went that I might prepare myself for it."

The wild, mad dream of blood passed away, and left Monsieur Récamier uninjured in life and fortune. His immunity may have been owing to the influence of the charms of Madame

Bernard, who found in Barrère a powerful protector, and compounded with her conscience by employing him in behalf of her husband and her daughter's father. On no other grounds does it seem possible to explain the escape of a rich banker and a royalist *Receveur de Finances* from the insatiate guillotine.

When men and women began to breathe again, under the steady rule of the Directory, Paris was seized with a feverish lust of amusement. The violent re-action overpowered the nerves of the calmest, and society plunged frantically into a vortex of bewildering pleasure. In the fêtes and revels that marked this new phase of national madness, the astonishing beauty of Madame Récamier produced a vivid sensation. At the balls and banquets of the Tuileries, she was followed by eager and excited crowds, who struggled fiercely to obtain but a passing glance at so much loveliness. When she held the plate at the church of St. Roch, on the occasion of some charity, the congregation scandalized the decency of the place by climbing benches and pillars to gaze at her, and a collection of twenty thousand francs attested the

sincerity of their admiration. She was then about twenty years old, in the flush and bloom of early womanhood. Her complexion was brilliantly dazzling—an unusual charm in a Frenchwoman; her face was round, lit up by lustrous brown eyes and a fascinating smile; her hair was brown, glossy and abundant; the mouth small, and the teeth like pearls. The figure was small, but finely moulded; the feet exquisite, and the shoulders white and rounded. In a word, Madame Récamier was a beauty—a beauty of the earthly order; formed to captivate and allure, rather than to inspire—a beauty such as Lely loved to paint, not like the pure and spiritual Madonnas of a Guido or a Correggio.

In 1798, Monsieur Récamier, who in an age of military contracts and national loans, grew daily wealthier, purchased a house in the Rue du Mont Blanc (now Chaussée d'Antin) that had originally belonged to Monsieur Necker. The circumstance originated Madame Récamier's intimacy with Madame de Staël. Here all the wit and beauty, fame and ambition of Paris—its notables, its intrigantes, its statesmen, and

its soldiers—gathered eagerly to worship the presiding goddess of the rich banker's fêtes ; but her more intimate friends repaired to her favourite retreat at Clichy, which wealth had made luxurious, and art embellished with the most refined attractions. She made the acquaintance of Lucien Bonaparte, and he, too, attached himself to the car of the triumphant beauty. In the height of his passion he gave a dinner and a concert to the First Consul, at which she was to be the principal attraction. Napoleon was struck with the rare and refined character of her loveliness, and Madame Récamier was not displeased at the evident admiration of the great soldier. Fouché afterwards came to her, and whispered, "The First Consul thinks you charming;" and when Lucien was pouring at her feet his insipid phrases of devotion, his brother said, with an emphasis that gave eloquence to his words, "And *I*, too, should like to go to Clichy." At dinner he left a seat empty at his side, in which Madame Bacciochi, his eldest sister, attempted to place Madame Récamier, but to the First Consul's evident annoyance, she seated herself further off.

“Monsieur le Second Consul, placed himself
“ah, ah, Citizen Consul,” cried
“close to the most beautiful, eh?”
“Afterwards inquired why she did not sit by
him. The answer was flattering: “I could
not dare.

Lucien, taking advantage of the fact that his
beauty named herself—or was named by her
sister—Juliet, chose to play the part of Romeo,
and addressed her a collection of love-letters,
in the most rapturous language. She
showed them to her husband, and proposed to
open her doors to the impassioned lover; but
Monsieur Récamier considered the pecuniary
advantages of an intimacy with the brother of the
First Consul, and desired her to continue her
complaisances, while preserving her virtue. She took
advantage, however, of telling Romeo, at
a large party, that his love letters were very
fine, but advised him to cultivate politics, in
which he might make a figure, in preference to
literature, in which he would surely fail.
Lucien, at a later period, endeavoured to re-
claim his letters, but Madame Récamier re-
fused to return them, fearing they might be
used against her.

It was about this time she made the acquaintance of Matthieu de Montmorency, a man of many virtues and many accomplishments, whose influence was always exercised to strengthen Madame Récamier in the hour of temptation, and whose purity of mind and earnest religious faith did something towards the purification of her life. She was a beauty, and she knew it; the idol of that gay, irresistible French society which knows so well how to repay the devotion of its votaries; the theme of song; the goddess of *le beau monde*; very capable of love, but denied its natural exercise as wife and mother. If her path, then, ran among the flowers, not the less did it skirt the brink of the precipice; and her friend's advice and counsel were often needed and always welcome. She did not disdain the flatteries of her admirers. Often she encouraged them to an extent that in England would have been considered criminal. But from the testimony of impartial witnesses, it seems clear that she never actually overstepped the bounds of virtue. "She was the only woman," said Charles James Fox, "who united the attractions of

pleasure to those of modesty;" but a woman who is always trembling on the verge of danger, needs such a friend as Matthieu de Montmorency to counsel her in time. Yet his feelings must have resembled those with which a man of right sympathies watches the evolutions of an able but daring gymnast; charmed with the skill, pleased with the self-reliance, but every moment apprehensive of a fatal result.

Fox was in Paris in 1802, when Madame Récamier was at the zenith of her reputation. He almost divided with her the allegiance of the gay world; the Parisian beaux imitated his costume; and the Parisian shop-windows were crowded with his portraits. Between the statesman and the beauty so close an intimacy was established that scandal made busy with it. She called upon him one day, to accompany her in a drive along the Boulevards.

"Before you came," she said, "I was the fashion; it is a point of honour, therefore, that I should not seem jealous of you."

When sitting with her in her box at the opera, a copy of an ode was placed in the hands of each, in which Fox was panegyricized

as Jupiter, and Madame Récamier as Venus. The Englishman was confused at the imputation; but the French lady treated it with indifference.

Among Madame Récamier's friends were Moreau and Bernadotte, who were both suspicious of the First Consul, whilst he was jealous of them. Madame Récamier's autobiographical sketches affords some curious glimpses of the scenes behind the scenes in this era of ambitious struggle.

In 1803, Bernadotte, who saw with disgust Napoleon's deliberate design of concentrating in himself all the power of France, endeavoured to form a coalition against him. As Moreau was the only French general whose popularity equalled the First Consul's, it was essential to obtain his co-operation. Moreau, however, was a brave soldier and a skilful commander—nothing more. He was unfitted by nature and genius to cope with Napoleon in the great game of politics. When Bernadotte exclaimed :

“ Were I in your place, I would be this very night at the Tuileries, and dictate to Bonaparte the terms on which he should be allowed

to govern." Moreau replied, that he felt the danger to liberty, but dreaded civil war—nevertheless, he was ready when wanted; but were not his friends premature? The opportunity passed, while Moreau hesitated; Napoleon seated himself more firmly in his place; and in February, 1804, Moreau was arrested, in company with Georges Cadoudal and Pichegru. He was brought to trial, and Madame Récamier was a spectator of the scene.

"I felt deeply affected," she wrote, "to see in such a position the captain whose glory and untarnished reputation had so lately been the object of general esteem, and received the gratitude of all parties. Republicanism was now out of the question; the conspiracy was entirely confined to the Royalists. Moreau was completely a stranger to it; it was the Royalist party alone that stood up against the new power, and the cause of the ancient monarchy had for its leader a man of the people, Georges Cadoudal. • That intrepid Georges! As I looked at him, I thought that the head so freely, so energetically devoted, would fall on the scaffold, and, perhaps, be the only one that

was not saved, for he defended his friends—he made no defence for himself. When they sought to persuade him to follow the example of the other prisoners, and solicit a pardon, he replied :

“ ‘ Will you promise to give me a better cause to die for ?’

“ He was surrounded by men bearing aristocratic names, but during this trial every name appeared to sink into insignificance compared with that of Pichegru. His shade, for it was known he had perished in his solitary dungeon, seemed to stand by the side of each prisoner. There was another recollection—the death of the Duc d’Enghien—which filled everyone with mourning and horror at that time, even the partisans of the First Consul. Moreau was not allowed to speak, and he was led out between two gendarmes; he passed close to me, thanked me for coming, and asked me to come again; but we never met afterwards.

“ During this trial,” continues Madame Récamier, “ Bernadotte was very uneasy; he told me he had been sent for from the Tuileries. The secret conferences he had had at Grosbois

(Moreau's country house) with Moreau kept him in continual agitation lest a word should drop that might implicate him. He promised to come and tell me how he was received. When he came, he appeared very thoughtful, but much easier.

“ ‘ Well ? ’ said I.

“ ‘ Well, it was not exactly what I expected ; Bonaparte proposes a treaty between us. “ You see,” said Bonaparte, in his abrupt, peremptory manner, “ that the question is settled : the nation is for *me*. Do you choose to go with me and France, or to retire into private life ? ” ’

“ Bernadotte did not tell me his answer, but I know him too well to doubt one instant : he was not given to quiet and retirement ; I knew he would follow the path of ambition.

“ He continued :

“ ‘ I had no choice. I promised him no affection, but a frank adhesion, and I shall keep my word.’

“ I understood how their conversation had concluded, when I saw Bernadotte figuring at the Coronation as a marshal of the Empire. But they never were

friends, and Bonaparte contrived to make him feel his dislike even when granting him favours."

The evident partiality of Madame Récamier for what may be called the liberal party—her refusal to accept a post in the Imperial household, and Napoleon's jealousy of any person who appeared to share with him the attention of the Parisian public, soon banished from the mind of the Emperor the admiration which, as First Consul, he had felt for her, and he only waited an opportunity to make her feel his resentment. The time came. In the autumn of 1806 Monsieur Récamier failed. A loan of a million of francs from the Bank of France would have enabled him to maintain his position, but Madame Récamier was to be punished through her husband. The advance was refused. A terrible catastrophe followed, and Monsieur and Madame Récamier had to endure the pain of witnessing the ruin of hundreds who were involved in their own.

Her health and spirits having been affected by this cruel disaster, she went to spend the summer months of 1807 with Madame de

Staël at Coppet. Among the illustrious residents at Geneva at this time was Prince Augustus of Prussia, a nephew of Frederick the Great, and a handsome young man of twenty-four. He fell violently in love with the Parisian beauty, who was by no means indifferent to the passion he openly displayed. He offered her his hand, if she could obtain a divorce from the husband, whom half Paris declared to be her father. Madame Récamier was not unwilling to be a Princess. She was a Catholic, and Prince Augustus a Protestant; she was thirty, and the Prince four and twenty; she was already married, and her husband had lavished on her, in his days of prosperity, all the luxuries that wealth could procure; but the volatile and ambitious beauty could not resist the temptation.

She wrote to her husband, and proposed a divorce! Monsieur Récamier in reply expressed his willingness, but, at the same time, appealed to her better feelings — reminded her of his forlorn and desolate condition, and of the affection he had always shown her. If the divorce, however, *must* take place, he begged that the

necessary measures might be taken, not only out of Paris, but out of France.

Whether the letter appealed to her better self is uncertain ; but she gave the Prince no decisive answer then, and returned to Paris. The young lover, on his part, set out for Berlin to obtain the consent of his family to the undignified alliance. Then followed a protracted delay of four years. The Prince and the lady corresponded ; appointed interviews, which were always prevented by unforeseen obstacles ; until, at length, apparently by mutual consent, the love-suit dropped, and the Prince instead of a wife received her portrait. They met afterwards in 1815, at Paris ; and in 1825 at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, but both had grown too wise to renew the criminal folly of 1807.

Her frequent visits to Madame de Staël—the *bête noir* of Napoleon's imagination—the Mordecai at the gate, whose presence was obnoxious to the conqueror, even in the hour of his most brilliant scenes—who seemed, like the slave of Philip of Macedon, to be continually reminding him that he was mortal—drew down upon her, in 1811, the weight of imperial

anger, and she was banished from Paris. To a gay and lively Frenchwoman such a sentence is almost as terrible as a penalty of death. She retired at first to Chalons, afterwards to Lyons, where she enjoyed the agreeable society of another of Napoleon's victims, the Duchess de Chevreuse. In the spring of 1812, she set out for Italy, and establishing herself at Rome soon gathered around her a brilliant circle at her house in the Corso.

The abdication of Napoleon in 1814 restored her to her beloved Paris; and her husband having re-established himself as a banker, she was enabled to flaunt through a brilliant but worthless life as a social queen.

Her new adorer was no less a personage than the illustrious Châteaubriand, the author of the "Génie du Christianisme;" and he was promoted at once to a very high place in her affections. She was forty, and married; he was more than forty, and married; but they, nevertheless, maintained an open and undisguised flirtation. It called forth a strong remonstrance from Matthieu de Montmorency:—

"Ah, madame," he wrote, "what rapid pro-

gress must this evil have made thus to estrange you from your best friends ! Does not this thought alarm you ? Ah, turn—there is yet time—turn to Him who gives strength when the wish to obtain it is sincere—to Him who alone can cure all ills. God and a valiant heart combined can do anything. I pray from the depths of my soul, and with all the strength which the ardour of my wishes gives me, that you may be upheld and enlightened ; that you may be preserved by His powerful aid from weaving with your own hands a chain of wretchedness, which will make those who love you even more wretched than yourself.”

A second failure of her husband's in 1819, once more compelled a partial retirement, and Madame Récamier established herself in a modest residence in the Convent of the Abbaye-aux-Bois, in the Rue de Sèvres. Here she remained, in a small apartment on the first floor, until 1838 ; and here she received a succession of celebrities, English and foreign—men of letters, distinguished savants, wits, poets, statesmen, diplomatists — English peers and peeresses—so that not to know Madame Ré-

camier was, in time, a proof of signal obscurity. In 1825, she lost her old and attached friend, Matthieu de Montmorency; in 1830, died Monsieur Récamier.

As the years passed by, friend after friend dropped from her glittering circle; but new acquaintances sprung up to fill the empty places. As she witnessed the stormy close of the reign of Charles X., and the intrigues of the early years of Louis Philippe, she became a sort of connecting link between the men and memories of the First, and the men and hopes of the Second Revolution. Her rooms were now filled with the worthies of *Jeune France*, as they had formerly been with the great men of the Revolution. For, though gifted herself with no special abilities, she had always loved to gather round her men of talent. She felt that their admiration yielded the sweetest flattery.

In the beginning of 1847, Madame de Châteaubriand died. It was a sad and pitiful time for Madame Récamier and her friend; she was almost blind in both eyes, and had just undergone an operation for cataract—he was

shattered and feeble, incapable even of rising from his seat unassisted, his memory impaired. "In this state he was carried daily to the Abbaye; he seemed only to live during the three hours he spent with Madame Récamier, and one day, to her astonishment, he entreated her to marry him. She was decided in her refusal! she said, "Why marry at our age? If you do not like to live alone, I am ready to come and live with you. If I were younger, I should not hesitate; I would joyfully accept the right to devote myself to you. But I *have* this right; age and blindness give it to me; who could object? Let us change nothing." M. de Châteaubriand was not satisfied; but she did not tell him her real reason, which was most touching. To a friend she said with perfect simplicity. "If I had thought he would be happier, I would not have refused; but the only cheerful moments he has in the day are when he comes to the Abbaye. I am convinced that if I lived with him, that slight excitement which gives a little variety to his existence would be lost."

Châteaubriand died in July, 1848, while

France was in the throes of her third Revolution. His death had been long expected; yet a blow does not physically wound the less because it has been long anticipated. He was the last of her friends—*Ultimus Romanorum*—the last of the illustrious men who had hailed her as queen and goddess; and she bitterly felt his loss.

Her own career was near its close. In April, 1849, the cholera broke out in Paris. Madame Récamier was not afraid of dying, but she shrunk from death in so terrible a form. To avoid its ravages, she removed to the *Bibliothèque Nationale*; but she could not escape from fate. On the 10th of May, she was seized with the premonitory symptoms; on the 11th, she was a corpse. She had completed nearly two and seventy years when she was thus removed from life by the death, which of all others, she the most dreaded.

On looking back over the preceding pages, we cannot but acknowledge that there was little in Madame Récamier's career to warrant the biographer's zeal. In her time, she played a conspicuous part; was constantly upon the

gay and glittering stage ; the audience applauded her loudly, and illustrious hands flung at her garlands and bouquets. Now that the applause has died out—now that the lamps burn dimly—now that the silent stage is given up to shadows—we wonder what there was in her acting to secure her so wide a fame. We look in vain for a flash of genius, for a burst of noble emotion. We cannot recognize one great and dignified attitude ; we do not carry away the recollection of any salient epigram or felicitous condensation of wit and wisdom in a phrase. Judging from the narratives of her most partial biographers, we must conclude that she was vain, greedy of admiration, an errant coquette, a somewhat frivolous intruder on the threshold of criminal passion. What was she more ? A beauty ? Yes ; but could beauty alone have secured her so wide a repute among her contemporaries ? She did not even converse brilliantly, like a Du Deffand or a De Staël. She did not write charming epistles like a De Sévigné ; and yet she was assiduously courted by famous wits and accomplished men of letters. Partly, we may suppose her celebrity to have

arisen from her profession of liberal principles under the stern *régime* of a Bonaparte; partly it was owing to the tact with which she drew out the best qualities, and flattered the *amour propre* of her visitors. Moreover, if she did not converse well, she could listen—she could suggest—she could guide and maintain a conversation, and afford opportunities for the display of each famous talker in his turn.

If a woman is rather clever, and very pretty, it is her own fault—granted a proper starting point, of course—if she does not secure a fair amount of social success. Of this Madame Récamier was well aware, and by gathering around her men of letters, she drew off upon herself some partial reflection of their fame. Your fine wits are mere babies in the hands of a shrewd and pretty woman, and permit themselves to be made contribute to her reputation in the most innocent manner possible. They first exalt her in public opinion by the homage they accord her, and in turn are themselves convinced of her superiority by that very public opinion which they were the first to inspire!

Such reputation as Madame Récamier acquired—mainly, as we believe, through the exaggerated flatteries of her contemporaries—is not likely to endure very long in the gradual shocks of time. She was, in her day, a “social success;” but as nothing has survived her to prove her possessed of wit or genius, we fear that posterity at first will criticize, and afterwards reverse, the verdict passed by her too generous friends. The influence of Women is rarely permanent. They mould the manners and affect the tastes of the age, but the sphere of their power is limited, and their glory never penetrates into the mighty future. Nothing is so fleeting as the reputation won by the Queens of Society, and the bright and beautiful ladies of Fashion. With them it is, literally, *La Reine est morte ! Vive la reine !* The sceptre passes from hand to hand with wonderful facility ; and each new occupant of the social throne finds herself surrounded by as many and as earnest admirers as gathered at the feet of her predecessors. Yet, whoever would study the inner life of history, whoever would see something of the interior of that society which

manifests itself externally in laws and government, the debates of parliaments, and the battles of armies, must not neglect the *salon* of the beauty, or the drawing-room of the Queen of Fashion. The reign of Louis the Fourteenth must be examined in the boudoir of La Vallière and the closet of Madame de Maintenon, as well as in the camp of Turenne, and the council-chamber of Colbert. These light and unpretending pages which we have dedicated to certain Famous Beauties and Historic Women, are not, therefore, altogether without value, if they suggest to the reader some new views of social life, and direct his attention to those aspects of history which are usually neglected by the historian as unworthy of his dignity.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

ILLUSTRATIONS, NOTES, &c.

Lord Buckhurst.—Vol. I., p. 6.

Charles, Lord Buckhurst, afterwards Earl of Middlesex, and finally Duke of Dorset, was born in 1637, died in 1705-6. Though a bitter satirist in his verses, he was good-natured to a fault; was a master of the arts of address and good-breeding; charitable, generous, and humane. In the first Dutch war he served as a volunteer under the Duke of York, and wrote—or completed—a ballad that will endure as

long as the English language ("To all you ladies now at hand") the night before the great battle in which Opdam, the Dutch admiral, was blown up. One can hardly agree with Prior that, "there is a lustre in his verses like that of the sun in Claude Lorraine's landscapes," yet they possess the merits of lucidity, point, and elegance. Horace Walpole says of him, "He had as much wit as his royal master, or his contemporaries, Buckingham and Rochester, without the royal want of feeling, the Duke's want of principle, or the Earl's want of thought."

Thomas Killigrew—Vol. I., p. 6.*

Thomas Killigrew (1611-1682) was page of honour to Charles I., and attended Charles II. throughout his weary banishment. After the Restoration he was made groom of the bed-chamber and master of the revels, while he performed the duties—if not actually filling the place—of king's jester.

Dryden's Play of "Tyrannic Love"—
Vol. I., p. 8.

This tragedy contains the famous simile on the approach of death :

"As some faint pilgrim, standing on the shore,
 First views the torrent he would venture o'er,
 And then his goal upon the farther ground,
 Loath to wade through, and loather to go round :
 Then dipping in his staff, does trial make
 How deep it is, and, sighing, pulls it back :
 Sometimes resolv'd to fetch his leap ; and then
 Runs to the bank, but there stops short again :
 So I at once
 Both heavenly faith and human fear obey :
 And feel before me in an unknown way.
 For this blest voyage I with joy prepare,
 Yet am asham'd to be a stranger there."

Epsom.—Vol. I., p. 15.

The early celebrity of Epsom was owing to the discovery of its wells in 1618, and the further promulgation of their efficacy by Lord North, in 1645. After the Restoration it became a place of fashionable resort, and was much frequented by the Court of Charles II. Pepys went thither, of course, and found it very pleasant to "oversee the various companies

that were there walking." "But Lord!" he exclaims, "to see how many I met there of citizens that I would not have thought to have seen there, that they had ever had it in their heads or purses to go down there." Sir John Menzies wrote a poem in praise of Epsom; Shadwell placed there the action of "a clever comedy;" and Dr. Burton eulogized it in euphonious Greek.

De Grammont.—Vol. I., p. 53.

The author in referring to the matchless "Memoirs of De Grammont," has sometimes quoted them as the work of De Grammont himself, and sometimes as by Count Hamilton. Strictly speaking, their authorship should always be attributed to the latter, but it is very probable that to De Grammont may be due much of the vivacity of the descriptions, and many of the most brilliant sketches of character.

*Louis XIV. and Henrietta of Orléans.—
Vol. I., p. 112.*

There seems at one time to have been a

project of marrying Louis XIV. to his cousin Henrietta, when Anne of Austria was alarmed by his passionate attachment to Marie de Mancini, the niece of Cardinal Mazarin. But Louis does not appear to have entertained for her either affection or admiration until some years later, when time had developed the charms of her person and the powers of her mind.

*Death of Henrietta of Orléans.—Vol. I.,
p. 148.*

Since writing the text, we have referred to Mignet's *Succession d'Espagne*, where (Vol. III., p. 209-210) is recorded the despatch of M. de Lionne to Colbert, the French ambassador in London, dated July 1st, 1670, and are bound to confess that it apparently proves Henrietta's death to have proceeded from natural causes. A post-mortem examination of the body was made, under the direction, or in the presence, of Guy Patin, the celebrated physician, and no trace of poison was discovered. It is true that this is no satisfactory proof in

itself, for medical skill was scarcely a match, in those days, for the skill of the poisoner, and all the medical witnesses were not in agreement upon this point; but other circumstances seem to confirm Guy Patin's evidence. At all events, Saint Simon's circumstantial narrative—which, he says, he received from M. Joly de Fleury, a magistrate, who, in his turn, received it from Brissac, one of the king's attendants—is open to great doubt, and was coloured by his strong personal antipathies. We may add here, that the best edition of the Duc de Saint Simon's Memoir, is that edited by M. Chérvel, and comprised in two vols.

Fleurette and Henri Quatre.—Vol. I., p. 266.

The reader must beware how he makes Henri Quatre responsible for the love-story introduced in the text. The tale is based by its French author, upon an incident of the king's younger days, which furnished, if we mistake not, the theme of a poetical romance, by Kennedy, entitled "The Arrow and the Rose."

The Regent Duke of Sudermania.—
Vol. II., p. 143.

After the assassination of Gustavus III., by Ankerstroëm, at a masked ball, the king's brother, Duke of Sudermania, was appointed Regent—Gustavus IV. being then only fourteen years of age. The Duke held the regency from 1792 to 1799.

Juniper Hall.—Vol. II., p. 145.

Juniper Hall, on the road to Leatherhead and Mickleham, Surrey. It was built about 1785 by a Mr. David Jenkinson. Norbury Park is now the seat of Mr. Grissell.

Benjamin Constant,—Vol. II., p. 157.

Benjamin de Constant de Rebecque was born at Lausanne in 1767. His political works were formerly held in high esteem. After witnessing many eventful changes in the history of his country, he died when it was in the throes of another great revolution—1830.

6. **What**

